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SERMONS.

SERMONS

BY THE LATE

REV. JOHN SCOTT, M. A.

VICAR OF NORTH FERRIBY, INCUMBENT OF ST. MARY'S,
AND LECTURER IN THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY TRINITY IN HULL.

EDITED

BY THE REV. JOHN SCOTT, M. A.

INCUMBENT OF ST. MARY'S,
AND LECTURER IN THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY TRINITY IN HULL.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Editor had thought of prefixing to these Sermons, a brief Memoir of the Author; but in addition to the delay which this would have occasioned, it appeared to many of the friends of the deceased, that in so slight a sketch as it must necessarily have been, many important particulars must have been omitted, and nothing of his correspondence could have been introduced. The idea of a Memoir has, however, by no means been abandoned, and it is the express object of this Advertisement, to request that such friends as possess letters, or other documents which they may not deem private, would favour the Editor with the loan of them. Those who kindly furnish such papers, may rely on their being kept with the utmost care, and ultimately returned.

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INTRODUCTION.

In preparing the accompanying volume for the press, many feelings of a mournful kind have mingled with those which were grateful and satisfactory. The undertaking was commenced in obedience to the call of many of the author's best friends, and considerable pains have been taken to render the publication as correct as possible. Mistakes however there will certainly be found, which would not have appeared had the work passed under the revising hand of the author. For these I solicit the reader's indulgence. At the same time, I should wish it to be very distinctly understood, that the work is entirely *posthumous*. The sermons have been printed as they were hastily written for the pulpit, and no idea, probably, was further from the mind of him who wrote them, than that they would thus appear before the public.

Though this may perhaps render them less acceptable to the fastidious reader, yet it is hoped that it will enhance their value with those who were acquainted with the style and manner of the

deceased. Such will be able to trace in them more of the peculiar characteristics of his preaching.

Earnestly do I hope that they will be found generally useful. That consideration was ever nearest to the author's heart, and nothing would have been more delightful to his mind, than the thought of doing good by his writings, when he could no longer do it by his public ministrations.

I cannot take a better opportunity of paying the best tribute of thanks, on behalf of myself and my family, to those friends who have so kindly and promptly promoted the interests of this publication. I trust they will never have cause to regret the assistance they have afforded.

It was intended to furnish a list of subscribers to the volume; but some objected to the publication of their names, and the great difficulty of obtaining a *correct* return of names from so many and such distant places, rendered it scarcely possible to hope, that a sufficient degree of accuracy could be secured. It has therefore been entirely omitted.

JOHN SCOTT.

Hull, August 20, 1835.

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SERMONS.

SERMON I.

PSALM CIV. 34.

MY MEDITATION OF HIM SHALL BE SWEET.

IT is the Apostle's injunction, "Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again I say, rejoice." In God the humble Christian has indeed an unchanging source of joy the most refined and exalted. All other things, besides that they are in their very nature insufficient for happiness, may change, or may be torn from us; or if they be not torn from us, we must unavoidably leave them ere long. But we never can go from God's presence: we never can be brought into scenes where his consolations may not follow us, and wherein they shall not be sufficient for us. The contemplation of God,—if we have peace with him through our

Lord Jesus Christ, may at all times and in all circumstances, fill us with comfort that cannot be expressed. We may say with the Prophet Habakkuk, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; though the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; though the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will joy in the God of my salvation."

This joy in God seems to have been attained in a delightful degree by the Scriptural saints, even under the Old Testament: and none possessed it more abundantly than David, though no man had a greater share of persecutions and troubles, and though all his latter days were oppressed with the cares of royalty. He not only enjoyed it himself, but he has rendered an invaluable service to the church of God, by the provision he has made for guiding her sons, in all ages, to the attainment of the same privilege. The pious mind can hardly muse upon his writings without the same fire being kindled in itself.

But it is not a mere speculative knowledge of God, nor even a bare persuasion that we are in the favour of God,—however well grounded such persuasion may be,—that can of itself give to the mind this joy in God. There are many times

when we may be well satisfied that this is our case, and yet be far from happiness. It is not the persuasion that he shall eventually recover, which can make a diseased wretch comfortable: he must feel in himself the alacrity of returning health. So neither is it sufficient that we be assured of being one day recovered from sin and all its consequences; we must even now feel in ourselves the glowings of holy affections towards their proper objects; we must be possessed at the time of a right state of mind towards God, and as consequent upon it, towards man also, and towards heaven and earth, and all things around us, in order to our possessing actual happiness. And these affections must be excited by holy meditation. Of this there are so many glorious subjects, that it might be thought we should at all times be ready to say, "My meditation of them shall be sweet." But they all centre in God, or lead directly to him.

My purpose is to speak of this MEDITATION of God: the DISPOSITIONS which are necessary to it: the OBJECTS which the mind regards in it: and the SOURCES of its sweetness. And though my remarks should contain nothing but what may be familiar to pious minds; yet the nature of the things to be spoken of may, I hope, secure them from being distasteful to such persons. The simplest medita-

tion of them must always be "sweet" to us, if we are rightly affected towards them.

I. By MEDITATION then, I understand the simple unforced reflection of the mind. It implies a degree of application and intention of mind, but not so much as may denominate it *study*. It is the natural train of thought, unrestrained by exactness of method, into which the mind at ease and leisure, but not idle and vacant, falls as occasion and circumstances prompt; and often it will be interspersed with addresses to Almighty God, or to our own souls, offering prayer or praise to him, and exciting ourselves to delight in him.

In meditation, our design—so far as we are influenced by design—is rather to have our hearts affected and improved by what we already know, than to gain new information to our understandings. Whatever subject offers itself to our notice, may very properly become the occasion of such meditation; though God himself will be the ultimate object of it. We cannot open our eyes or our ears, we cannot move our hands or our feet, we cannot in the slightest manner exercise the faculties of our minds, but we have presented to us what might give rise to devout meditation. Heaven and earth are full of objects which might pleasingly engage our thoughts, and lead our

minds to God. How grievous to think that with all this rich provision before us, and almost forcing itself upon our notice, so much of our time should be passed in an humiliating vacuity of thought, or in conversation unimproving and uninteresting! How desirable is it that we should exercise ourselves to something better; that our solitary walks, and our hours of recreation might make accessions to our piety, and our friendly intercourse be improved to mutual edification. This would give to all an inexpressible sweetness. Such communion of the saints would leave a savour behind it, and furnish a delightful foretaste and pledge of a better communion hereafter, never to be interrupted.

The Psalms of David abound with beautiful examples of the pious exercise to which we allude. Let me remind you of his eighth Psalm. The sacred writer walks out in a starry evening: he muses on all God's works, till cheered by the pleasing meditation he breaks forth, "O Lord our Governor, how excellent is thy name in all the world! Thou that hast set thy glory above the heavens." "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained!" The nineteenth Psalm makes a similar use of the contemplation of the sun shining in his strength, and "rejoicing

as a strong man to run a race." The hundred and fourth, the hundred and thirty-ninth, and the hundred and forty-fifth may also be referred to. All these and many others, shew indeed that the writer's soul was satisfied "as with marrow and fatness." What a sweet and mild lustre does such a spirit and such a practice, cast over all the works of God! To a mind formed and habituated to it, the heavens shine more serenely, the fields wear a brighter hue,—because to it, all nature reflects the face of her Lord, and leads the thoughts to still more delightful, though invisible displays of goodness ineffable. Would you be more happy, my Christian brethren, cultivate more this spirit of devout meditation.

"To have pleasure in all the works of God," is given as the character of his people. But though his works are the medium of conveying it, yet it is God himself who is the source of "their exceeding joy."

II. Now in order to our rejoicing in God,—in addition to the general revelation of his mercy to us, certain DISPOSITIONS and certain HOPES are requisite. Two cannot "walk together except they be agreed." We cannot delight in God, except we resemble him in our dispositions. One that loves sin, cannot take pleasure in God, who

hates sin. One who does not find his happiness in religion, cannot delight himself in God, which is the same thing. If then any suppose they do the one and do not the other, they must be in error. If any suppose they love God, and keep not his commandments, they deceive themselves.

Now we are all born in sin, and the "children of wrath;" "the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God." He then to whom the meditation of God is sweet, must be one who is born again of the Holy Ghost, a true penitent, a sincere believer in Jesus Christ, one who has returned unto God through him, and who shows his repentance to be genuine, and his faith sincere, by his renewed obedience. He must be one, who while he laments that he is far from what he ought to be, can yet "rejoice in the testimony of his conscience" to his "simplicity and godly sincerity," to his being before God, what to man he professes himself to be; one who has some measure, at least, of peace and hope towards God and our Lord Jesus Christ. Of these things we need not now speak particularly: they are continually brought under your consideration.

III. We hasten therefore, to what is the principal part of our subject:—the OBJECTS which the mind especially regards in its meditations

of God which are accompanied with so much pleasure.

The divine perfections are the immediate object of the mind in these contemplations. These are what make the Most High to be that glorious Being which he is, and which therefore so much engage and delight the renewed mind. Indeed it is only by knowing them as they are discovered to us in his works and by his word, that we know God at all. The perfections of God, I say, are the primary objects, but the relations in which he stands to us are necessarily included, inasmuch as they bring home and endear those perfections to us.

In enlarging on the perfections of God, I will notice the distinction between those which are NATURAL, and those which are MORAL.

1. By NATURAL perfections I mean,

(1.) *Almighty Power.* "I know," saith Job, "I know that thou canst do every thing;" and again, the Psalmist, "God hath spoken once, twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God;" and the full conviction, the deep veneration, with which these sentiments are uttered, could not, I am persuaded, be separated from very delightful impressions of mind. Again: "The works of the Lord are great:" "Come, behold the works of the Lord, his mighty and his terrible acts." The great *Majesty* of God is itself

a subject of delightful meditation, and one in which the saints of old greatly exult. To compare the works of Him that sitteth in the heaven, high over all from the beginning, with the puny efforts of the mightiest of mortals: to think how he bringeth to nought the counsels of princes, disconcerting with a word or look all their profoundest plans,—while—though "the heathen rage and the kingdoms are moved"—yet "his counsel standeth fast, and he performeth all his pleasure:"—the meditation is grand, and, connected with the other considerations we are to notice, sweet. How sweet, for instance, to remember amid the tempestuous reign of impiety and tyranny, which often threatens the very existence upon earth, of the church of God—how sweet to remember that "the Lord on high is mightier" than all his adversaries; and that his eye is ever upon his church; that "he doth water it every moment," and supplies it with hidden strength: that "lest any hurt it, he will keep it night and day;" and that the "gates of hell shall never prevail against it."

(2.) Again: The *Omnipresence* and *Omniscience* of the Almighty are equally sublime, and equally delightful subjects of thought. Observe that noble contemplation of them which we have in the hundred and thirty-ninth Psalm, and the happy

effects which it wrought upon the mind of David. Nothing can hide us from the eye of "Him with whom we have to do." No evil can befall us, and he knoweth it not. "His eyes did see our substance yet being imperfect, and in his book were all our members written, as in continuance they were formed." Every step of our lives has been noticed by him, and as he first "breathed into us the breath of life," so will he lead us down to the gates of the grave, and not till he wills shall they open unto us. "O how precious are thy thoughts concerning me! how great is the sum of them!" How passing all astonishment, that to His mind present themselves at once, and without any confusion, all things past, present, and to come: all the thoughts of the hearts of all rational beings, throughout universal creation. Well may we say, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it;"—my mind can in no degree grasp it. O how wonderful is this Glorious Lord God Almighty!

(3.) Equally incomprehensible, and equally delightful to be contemplated, is the *Eternity* of God. Connected with it, we shall speak of his *Immutability*. We are but yesterday come into being, and to-morrow we shall be no more in this world. All the works of men, and even the world itself, may be traced back to a beginning: a little while

ago, and they were not: a little while to come, and they shall not be. But, " from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God." All things here are in perpetual flux: all going to decay. But " thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail."

To us creatures of a day, it seems long since the age of the Patriarchs: and there is something extremely pleasing to the mind to reflect,—after all the intervening generations which have passed away,—this God to whom I am praying, is the same to whom Abraham the father of the faithful prayed, four thousand years ago: the same with whom Moses interceded, and Solomon, and Isaiah, and the Prophets. This God before whom I walk, is He with whom Enoch walked; to whom Abel sacrificed; with whom Noah found grace: He of whom I meditate, is He of whom David meditated: He is the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever: the same in mercy, the same in goodness, the same in power, the same in truth: He *is* so; he *must* be so; I *find* him so: Our fathers " looked to him—their faces were not ashamed:" and He who pardoned their offences, I trust pardoneth mine. He who blessed them, I trust blesseth me; and will bless my children after me: " Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations."

(4.) This great and glorious Being is also *self-existent* and *independent*. He derives nothing from

any besides, nor can be influenced by any events. His motives for what he doeth are taken only from Himself; therefore he changeth not: "with him is no variableness neither shadow of turning:" He "blotteth out iniquity for *his own* sake." He is "GOD and not man," therefore the sons of Jacob are not consumed.

2. Let us pass now to the notice of what we term the MORAL PERFECTIONS of God, in which his glory especially consisteth. Those of which we have spoken rather define and mark out Him, to whom the character of unbounded excellence belongs, than themselves form that character. They must in themselves alone considered, be awful. Could they exist apart from holiness, they could never engage or demand our love. But in the character of the Lord our God, along with all that is awful in authority, is united all that is venerable in wisdom, and lovely in goodness. All those excellences which, from their never in any human character meeting so perfectly, as not in some degree to intrench upon one another, seem to be opposite excellences;—all these blend, and harmonize, and mutually cast lustre each upon the other. In Almighty God, goodness never degenerates into weakness; justice into severity; nor wisdom into excessive caution. More than individual parental tenderness, consists along with

unbending regard to the dignity of universal government. But let us speak of the moral perfections also separately.

(1.) Of the *spotless purity* of the divine character. "God cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man." "He is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity." "Even the heavens are not clean in his sight!" What views do these and other scriptures give us of God's holiness, and consequent abhorrence of all evil! We expect not that they who yet love sin, and its polluted pleasures, should behold any beauty here; should find in the meditation of this perfection any transcendent sweetness. But the renewed mind will dwell on it with peculiar delight, when it knows, how in the redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ, holiness harmonizes with mercy. They who are taught of God "to hunger and thirst after righteousness," will ofttimes recur hither. They who know what it is, with many sighs, and prayers, and endeavours, to gain a little portion of purity of heart, which they value more than the gold of Ophir, and who pant for holiness as "their chief joy,"—will see something more lovely, more delightsome than words can express, in moral purity that never was spotted; in holiness so rooted, that it never could be even assailed. Especially, will "the meditation of it be

sweet," when it is remembered, that this is the example to which we are one day to be made like. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God:" "They shall awake up in his likeness and be satisfied," for ever.

(2.) Divine *Justice* is nothing but this perfect holiness, exhibited in the moral government of the universe. To us, who are ourselves exposed to its severest animadversions, it may wear an awful aspect. Yet there is no difficulty in proving it to be essential to perfect excellence of character, in the universal Sovereign. If it be fit that perfect laws should be enacted, and the laws of God can be subject to none of those imperfections, nor their execution be obstructed by any of those unforeseen circumstances, which attend all human laws—If, I say, it be fit that the world should be governed by perfect laws, and those laws supported, then perfect justice is necessary to the perfect Governor. Punishment in God arises not from defect of goodness, but from perfection of holiness; and the more we contemplate it with large and extended views—without the interference of inordinate self-love—and especially, as displayed in combination with infinite mercy in the cross of Christ, the more shall we be convinced that this is as necessary to the perfection of divine excellence, as any other attribute.

3. Time would fail us to speak at length of the inviolable *Truth* and *Faithfulness* of God,—which indeed may form a branch of his justice,—and of the *Wisdom* which abounds in the displays of all his other perfections. Let us only add a few words on that which we must ever contemplate with peculiar complacency and satisfaction.

(4.) The boundless *Goodness* of God. "God is love," and, "his tender mercy is over all his works." It shines through all the works of creation. His delight in the communication of being and blessedness, is apparent in all the works of nature. Ten thousand different orders of creatures, all made capable of happiness; all, from the insect to the archangel, furnished with sources of pleasure, suited to their varied natures and capacities, and all—except as sin has introduced evil—rejoicing in them: "the meditation of it is sweet!"

But mercy to sinful creatures;—mercy so unbounded, and mercy so conveyed, transcends all that could be done, for those that had never offended. That *we* should be permitted to rejoice in God; that the Lord God should dwell among the rebellious; that they should be admitted to the "adoption of sons through Jesus Christ," through the Son of God dying for our redemption—this is grace without a parallel—"love which passeth

knowledge." All words must fail to do it justice. Here then let us close in silent meditation, on what is too big for utterance—the inestimable love of God in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ—on the various peculiarities of mercy, which have led each one of us to the means of grace, and infused into many of our breasts the hope of glory. "The meditation may be sweet," and not more sweet than edifying.

Now great pleasure is often enjoyed in contemplating an excellent, lovely, and exalted character, with whom we have not any connexion, whom perhaps we never saw, nor ever can see. How much more if we can say, This illustrious man is my benefactor, my bosom friend, my father. The application of this remark to the relations which this glorious God bears to us, is easy. Even to say of him, This blessed Being is my maker; he gave me this body and this soul: he gave me my habitation, my friends, all my comforts: with what pleasure and what gratitude should it not fill us? how should it inspire us never to rest till we can say also, He is my reconciled Father in Christ Jesus. And if we can add this too, then what gratitude, what satisfaction, what contentment, what joy in God—our portion, our eternal and exceeding great reward—should ever fill our hearts! What worldly evil should greatly dis-

compose our minds! What should we dread but drawing down his displeasure upon us!

IV. I need add little upon my last head—the NATURE of the pleasure which arises from such meditations—in what their SWEETNESS consists. It consists, as I intimated before, in the holy affections which they excite in our minds. The ingredients of which the pleasure is composed, are such as these: *admiration; reverence; love; gratitude; hope; confidence; expectation.* These dispositions are what the happiness of the soul, (so generally, but so unwisely sought from outward circumstances,) must naturally consist in. Such dispositions, produced and called into exercise, by the agency of the Holy Spirit, constitute "the peace of God which passeth all understanding," "the joy unspeakable and full of glory." And in the uninterrupted and unrestrained exercise and expression of such affections, towards their ever present Object, no doubt greatly consists the happiness of the blessed in heaven. Whence is evident the essential connexion between happiness and holiness.

Are we not then, my Christian Brethren, exceedingly defective in that, on which we feel so much of our duty and so much of our happiness to depend? You, who are true Christians, will all

have known, more or less, the sweetness of such meditation; and if so, that no pleasures of earth are to be compared with it. But have you been diligent as you ought to be, in following after what is so satisfying, so improving? Do you not come vastly short of what you must have observed in David, and other Scripture saints; such even as possessed fewer advantages than you? Is there not much in Christians that calls for humiliation in this respect? Much, I will add, that calls for blame and reprehension? Do we not suffer our minds to be careful and troubled about many things, to the great detriment of our souls? Do we not devote much more time and thought to the world, and much less to the retired service of religion, than is our duty and our interest?

This is an age in which men—religious men—do so in an uncommon and lamentable degree:-in a degree which the writings of some preceding ages would condemn, as almost incompatible with a state of true piety. To this, it is owing no doubt, that Christians are no more fruitful and no more joyful.

I would address a few words to another description of persons. Are there none who are consciously strangers to all that joy in God, of which we have spoken? Who, if they at all read the Scriptures, and attend divine worship, do it not from

any spiritual pleasure they find, or expect to find in it? You, my friends, are unable to say, with the Psalmist, "My meditation of God shall be sweet."

On the contrary, you have not loved to think of God: with more pleasure, you turn your thoughts to any other subject. Especially with regard to the holiness of God; so far from saying with exultation, "Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at his holy hill, for the Lord our God is holy;" your inward wish has been that he were not so holy, that he would wink at sin, that he would let you go on in it, and yet not punish you. Not deliverance from every sin, but impunity in it, has been your heart's desire. Does not this shew that you are without true internal holiness; consequently that in your present state, you "cannot see the Lord?" You care not to think of God: surely then you love not God: for what friend is there whom you love, of whom you do not like to think?

You wish he hated sin less, or that he did not know your sins: that is, you wish he were not what he is: and what is this but to be as the apostle says—"enemies against God." The being what he is—especially so holy, is what constitutes his character and his glory; to wish that he were not so, is so to dislike his true character, as to

wish it did not exist. See then your need of reconciliation. See then your need of being born again. See your awful state,—enemies against God, "The wrath of God abideth on you." All the perfections of God, so sweet to the believer, are directed against you!—Who can rest in such a state? "Flee from the wrath to come." Even now God waiteth to be gracious—beseecheth you to be reconciled. "Now therefore is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." "Be ye reconciled unto God."

SERMON II.

PSALM XLII. 5.

HOPE THOU IN GOD.

THESE words may be considered not only as the address of David to his own soul, in a season of great distress; but as the voice of Revelation to man, the one grand exhortation which it addresses to him. The Almighty "looketh upon men:" he sees them—as all creatures must necessarily be—in themselves, poor, needy, and dependent: he sees them as sinners, bound fast in the chains of depravity, the slaves of Satan, exposed to the terrors of a guilty conscience; to the penalty of a broken law; and cursed with the sense of vanity and vexation in all their pursuits. He sees them in this miserable situation to which by sin they are reduced, looking out for some one to comfort them; but, alas! instead of betaking themselves to Him who alone can effectually help them, fleeing to objects which can only increase disappointment and distress. He "looketh upon

men," thus entangled in error and overwhelmed with misery; and though their crimes might well provoke his wrath to their destruction, yet, he is pleased to regard them with mercy, and to hold out to them the light of *hope*. The language in which he addresseth them is such as this: 'O ye sons of men, "ye have destroyed yourselves, but in me is your help:" "Look unto me and be ye saved:" "Acquaint now yourselves with me, and be at peace:" "Hope ye in God:" possess ye indeed, the hope which ye so anxiously grasp at, but let it not be placed on things which cannot profit, on creatures which can only disappoint you, but on ME; in me, whom by your sins ye have justly displeased, but who am still ready to have mercy upon you and succour you!'

Such is the merciful and gracious address of Divine Revelation at large, and of the Gospel of Christ in particular, to mankind: and it is briefly summed up in my text: "Hope thou in God." I will speak—

I. Of the NATURE OF THIS HOPE IN GOD.

II. Shew the EXTREME NEED WHICH MAN HAS OF IT.

III. Consider the OBSTACLES AND THE ENCOURAGEMENTS TO ITS EXERCISE.

IV. And Lastly, apply the text as AN EXHORTATION, and say to each of you—"Hope thou in God."

I. I am to make some observations on the NATURE OF THIS HOPE IN GOD.

The hope of which we are to speak, is nearly allied to that "trust in God," that "faith in God," on which the scriptures lay so much stress. I do not here understand merely the expectation occasionally formed of particular blessings, of which we stand in need. I consider it rather as describing the habitual state and temper of the pious man's mind. God is "his hope;" God is "his refuge, whereunto he always resorts;" God is "the portion," the support, "the dwelling place" of his soul. His mind is "staid upon God." In times of prosperity, the ultimate object of his rejoicing, is not the multitude of his riches, but the favour of the living God: and in the time of adversity, he is "not greatly moved," because, let what may be torn from him,—his God,—his portion,—his all, is immoveably secured. In Him he hopes: "his expectation is from Him:" he "trusts in him at all times:" and by this trust he is supported in the prospect of whatever he may have to encounter, in the vast unknown of futurity. Without hope in God he could enjoy nothing in life; and with it, he can go down undismayed to the grave and enter into eternity. God is "the strength of his heart and his portion for ever."

It is a hope which supposes its possessor to feel that he is poor, weak, foolish, and sinful: but it proceeds upon the assurance that God is rich, mighty, wise, and merciful: that he never failed, and never will fail, them that put their trust in him.

Prayer is its voice, its very breath. It vents itself in prayer; by prayer it betakes itself to God at all seasons. A hope in God, which can exist without prayer, is but presumption and delusion.

It closely connects with *submission* to his will. It does not vainly wish to choose for itself, and repine if the dispensations of the Almighty are contrary to what it had expected and desired. It commits itself to him: firmly believing that all his ways are wise and good: that though "clouds and darkness are round about him," yet "righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne:" that though "his paths are in the sea, and his footsteps are not known," yet "all the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies:" and that he will cause all things to work together for good to them that love Him. Such was the hope of David, here expressed. He was in circumstances of extreme distress: distress too which he might consider as the chastisement of his sins. This Psalm is supposed to have been penned by him when he fled from the foul and unnatural rebellion of his

son Absalom. He describes himself as overwhelmed with grief, yet "he encourages himself in the Lord his God;"—he calls himself to account and expostulates with his dejected soul, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, for the help of his countenance."

II. Let us shew the EXTREME NEED which man has of such hope in God.

Consider then the state and situation of man upon earth. His coming into the world, his continuance in it, and his condition during his passage through it, are alike beyond his own controul. He is the creature of a superior Power, *and is entirely* at the disposal of that Power. But how forlorn, how unutterably deplorable, must be the situation of a creature who is destitute of hope in his Creator: who is uncertain whether that Creator is favourably disposed to him or not: who knows not but he is a wretched outcast in the creation, rejected and disregarded by Him at whose disposal he absolutely lies. Yet such is the state of the man who possesses no well-founded hope in God.

But this is not all. Man is not a creature indifferent to good and evil, and who if he had no

particular good to hope for from his Creator, might likewise have no particular evil to fear. He is evidently and undeniably a sinful being, justly obnoxious to the disapprobation and wrath of a pure and perfect God. Further than this, awful marks of the divine displeasure do actually appear in the world. That sin is evidently followed by punishment, is proved by all the ills of life, and still more strongly by death—the termination of the whole. Mankind are evidently driven out of the world under marks of divine displeasure, such as may justly excite the most alarming apprehensions concerning what lies beyond the present scene. Men die not voluntarily, but because they must. And their death is an event of such a nature, as alarms and confounds them in the prospect. The little thought which many give to it, and the light manner in which they often speak of it, are no proofs that it is not terrible to them, but the contrary. They put it from their thoughts, because they dare not think of it. The weakness, the suffering, which bring man down to the grave, are in themselves very distressing to human nature; but infinitely more so, the thought of being torn from all we love, and introduced in a moment to a new state of existence, where all is utterly unknown, and where, as conscience suggests, and Scripture assures us, retribution shall have succeeded to trial,

and where the unpardoned sinner shall suffer the consequences of his misspent life. Without "hope in God," what mortal man, that is not lost to all reflection, or to all feeling, can dare to meet death, an enemy whom yet we must all meet, and under whose hand we must fall.

But, further, the very course of human life is such as must render "hope in God" absolutely necessary, if not to support, yet certainly to give peace to the reflecting mind. That "man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward," is not so much a truth revealed from heaven, as an observation suggested by fact. What scenes of calamity and suffering may we witness on every side of us! The field is too wide for us here to range in.

Let me not be misunderstood. I say not these things as if I would encourage any man to sink all enjoyment of his present comforts, in the foreboding apprehension of future evils, which are merely possible: but only to shew that no man possesses that of which—independently of "hope in God" —he may say, "This same shall comfort me."

How many do we witness around us labouring under the hardships of poverty; sinking under disease; mourning over heart-breaking trials in their families; bewailing the desire of their eyes, friends or relations, dear to them as their own souls, torn from them by the irremediable stroke

of death. And what security have we for ourselves? By what tenure do we hold any of our comforts—even those which may seem most necessary to our peace, and almost to our existence? We hold them by no tenure which can entitle us to call them *our own*. Yea, have we ourselves experienced none of these trials which are the lot of man upon the earth? Extraordinary, indeed, must his case be, who has escaped even all *severe* trials. And shall we not learn by all we have witnessed in others, or felt in ourselves, the need of having hope in God. How exposed are we on every side! How many afflictions are there which might befal us before another morning's dawn, under which all the efforts of any created being to comfort us, would be idle and vain! God only is a sufficient refuge and hope for us. His presence is an adequate support under every possible evil. Having hope—well-founded hope in Him, we may boldly say, we will fear none of those things which shall befal us: we may adopt the triumphant language of the Psalmist: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Having God for our hope, we may be confident that neither life nor death, nor

things present, nor things to come, shall deprive us of that which is our bliss: but if we are destitute of hope in God, we possess nothing which may not be torn from us, and leave us infinitely poor and wretched for ever.

The absolute uncertainty of all earthly comforts, sufficiently shews the need of hope in God. Riches may make to themselves wings and fly away. The favour of men may be exchanged for their aversion and enmity. Health must decline, and infirmities grow upon us. Our friends must die and leave us, or we must go before and leave them behind. Our children—what comfort can we take in them, if we have not hope in God concerning them? What satisfactory persuasion can we enjoy, that they shall be comforts, and not the occasion of severest affliction to us, except as we commit them to God, and hope in his grace to guide them aright. In short, Hope in God concerning them, is necessary to secure to the reflecting mind any true enjoyment from all his outward comforts while they last, and it is the only thing that can never be torn from him, and that can support him when all else shall fail.

III. But what GROUND has sinful man thus to place his hope in God? This is a question certainly of supreme importance; and, in itself,

involved in difficulty proportioned to its importance.

Man is fallen, guilty, and depraved: but God is holy—of purer eyes than to look upon iniquity. Total separation from him, and the everlasting suffering of his wrath constitute the appointed punishment of sin. How then can man ever draw nigh to God? How can he ever have hope towards him? "Wherewith shall he come before the Lord, and bow himself before the high God? Shall he come before him with thousands of rams, or with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall he give his first-born for his transgression, the fruit of his body for the sin of his soul?" No: such things are neither required, nor could they be sufficient. It is impossible for any thing that man can do, either to take it away, or make atonement unto God for it. Yet without atonement for sin, there is no access to God. Here is an obstacle opposed to man's having "hope in God"—which human efforts could never have overcome. But God, of his infinite mercy, unimplored, unsolicited, has himself removed it out of the way for ever. He hath laid our iniquities upon his own dear Son—"the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world." He hath made perfect atonement for us. He is appointed our Mediator, our High Priest, our Intercessor, to introduce us to the Father with

acceptance. By him the most guilty is allowed to draw near with humble confidence, to hope in God: yea, to look up to him as a Father who is ready to do for him whatever is good.

The way then to have hope in God, is to arise like the Prodigal, and to return to him through Christ, confessing and bewailing our manifold sins; imploring his mercy to pardon, and his grace to sanctify us: casting ourselves upon the goodness of God, and pleading his promises. Thus coming to him we shall find what we seek: and there is no promise in all the word of God, of which we may not in this way expect the fulfilment.

But, again; even those who have learned thus to come to God, and to place their hope in him, through a Saviour, will often find the sense of their own extreme imperfection and *unworthiness*, a powerful obstacle to the stedfast exercise of such hope. To this discouragement, however, they are not to yield. They ought to be abased before God in the deepest humility and repentance, for their great remaining sinfulness. But it ought not to be allowed to beat them off from hope in him. They stand before God, not trusting in their own righteousness, but in his manifold and great mercies, and the infinite merits of the Saviour. And these are always equally vast, and

equally free. Let them, therefore, walk watchfully and humbly; let them strive against sin, and be abased for it; but let them trust and not be afraid.

Again, the greatness of the *troubles* with which God is often pleased to try even those whom he most approves, frequently tempts them to abandon their hope. But this temptatation let them resist. Let them consider well the nature of the divine covenant with them. It by no means engages that they shall be exempted from troubles of any kind. They may be poor, sick, persecuted, slandered, tried in their families, and even tempted in their souls. Not exemption from troubles, but support under them, and final deliverance out of them, are the things promised. They are warned to expect tribulation: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but out of them all the Lord delivereth them." "In the world ye shall have tribulation," said our Lord to his disciples. "And what son is he," demands the apostle, "whom his Father chasteneth not?" "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Chastisements and afflictions are important means employed by God, for the correction of our moral evils—for the healing of our spiritual maladies—for making us partakers of the divine holiness. To be exempt from troubles might be

our choice for ourselves, but it would be an unwise choice. We judge too much as those who can see naught beyond that small part of their existence, which is to be passed in the present world, and can appreciate, but most imperfectly, their real interest even in that part. But our heavenly Father consults for us as one whose paternal care and providence extends to the whole of our never-ending life, and who perfectly perceives what, in every instance, will be for our advantage on the whole. And therefore, with a kindness which we must here believe, and which we shall hereafter see and adore, he spares us not the present momentary pain, which may work for us an accession to our future and eternal joy. 'Eternity, with all its importance, lies open to his view, and time appears as a point, and all its concerns as comparatively of no worth.' He pities every sorrow of his children: yet all their present sorrows he esteems as nothing compared with the benefit which they are to produce hereafter.

Let not afflictions, therefore, ever shake our "hope in God."

IV. Proceed we then lastly to the application of our text as an EXHORTATION, and to say to you all, "HOPE YE IN GOD." Though the peculiar supports and consolations arising from sure trust

and confidence in God as a Father and friend, can belong only to the righteous,—that is, to those who are recovered to God through the Saviour; yet giving to "hope in God" that extensive sense which we have done in this discourse, and considering it as including and beginning in a return to God, in the exercise of repentance and faith, we may with the utmost propriety address the exhortation "Hope ye in God," to all men of every description. Not that we may encourage the presumption of mankind by teaching them to look for good from the hand of God in their present course, supposing it a course of sin, but that we may persuade the sinner to forsake his way and return to the Lord, believing that He will thus have mercy on him. In this sense, as we asserted at the beginning, our text may be considered as the voice of revelation addressed to mankind at large.

Yes, my friends, the Bible is not that harsh and severe book which you may imagine, designed to rob you of your comfort: religion is not that gloomy service which you may apprehend; nor do its ministers take pleasure, as you sometimes surmise, in alarming and distressing the minds of men. No: the Bible proceeds from "the God of the spirits of all flesh:" and it is a book fraught with mercy for "the work of his hands." Religion is his institution, designed as much for your

good as for his honour. Ministers are his ambassadors sent—not to threaten and alarm and terrify men, further than may be necessary to induce them "to flee from the wrath to come,"—but to invite them to salvation. Sin hath ruined us: it hath converted into vanity and vexation, that which was in itself "very good." It hath embittered all the comforts which a gracious Creator had provided for his creatures. It hath vitiated and corrupted all the faculties of our souls: filled us with "a horrible disease" within: made us, while we continue under its power, incapable of happiness: unfit for the society of the pure and blessed spirits of heaven; and meet and deserving objects of the wrath to come. The Father of our spirits knoweth, and hath compassionated our condition: and in the blessed Bible he hath revealed to us a remedy suited to the exigencies of our case. And to urge you to receive and make use of this remedy, is our primary business.

The representations here made will not, we well know, be admitted by all: the correspondence of our statements with facts will not be felt by all. We know, and we lament it; because it hence comes to pass that multitudes, ignorant of their disease, refuse the offered remedy. But we must go on to make to men the representations, and to

address to them the exhortations, with which we are charged: hoping that He, in whose name we speak, will work with his own truths to render them effectual to persuade and to save some.

"Hope ye then in God!" Ye who have hitherto lived without God in the world, or have backslidden from him; ye who have buried all your thoughts and cares, your hopes and desires and anxieties in earthly things; learn ye the vanity of those things on which ye have hitherto set your hearts: learn ye how uncertain is their duration, how little they can do for you while they last; how soon they may be torn from you: and if they be your all, how poor, how miserable they will leave you in the hour of death, in the day of judgment, in the dread eternity which awaits you. Learn the necessity of some better confidence: of some which may support you in the time of calamity and disappointment, in the season of sickness and death: of some hope which may be the strength of your heart, even when flesh and heart fail you. "Hope ye in God." Betake yourselves unto him without further delay. Acknowledge your transgressions in hitherto idolizing the world, and neglecting God. Approach him now—while he sitteth on a throne of grace. Plead the merits of a Saviour. Acquaint now yourselves with him, and be at peace. Thus shall you find a peace

which deserves the name, and which shall never fail you.

Ye that fear the Lord—"Hope *ye* in God." You have returned unto him through the great Mediator. Cleave then steadfastly unto him with full purpose of heart. "Trust ye in the Lord *for ever*." "Let your expectation be *only* from him." Enlarge your expectations from him. "Pour out your hearts before him at all times," for he hath promised, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

"In all the changing scenes of life," let the Lord, the Lord only, be your hope.

Are you in prosperity? Let not prosperity withdraw your heart from God. If riches increase, beware "that you set not your heart upon them:" say not to "the gold," thou art my hope, and to the fine gold, "thou art my confidence." "Trust not in uncertain riches, but in the living God."

Are you in adversity? Do not despond. Be undismayed, and "hope to the end;" but let your hope be reposed, not on an arm flesh, and in what man can do for you, but in God. Let hope produce patience and submission: let hope keep you confined to those means only of deliverance or of comfort which are consistent with duty. Strive that the language of your heart may be the same with that of Job: "Though he slay me, yet will

I trust in him." This is our duty. We ought to trust in God, not only while he visibly succeeds our wishes, but when the commission of ourselves to him seems only to bring a death upon our hopes and desires. This I say is our duty. But of the difficulty of practising it, I am well aware. Who is sufficient for these things? How is it possible that our hearts, so weak, so foolish, so perverse, so unbelieving, so rebellious—should be brought to this temper? The answer is—"The grace of Christ is sufficient for us." It must be upon our knees, and with the records and promises of his word in our hands, that we must call upon our souls in such cases as David does in the text: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him." Blessed be God, we are taught in the holy Scripture to pray "The God of hope," the *Author* as well as the *Object* of hope, to "fill us with all joy and peace in believing, and to make us abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost!"

Whatever be our care, or our trouble, or our desire, personal or relative, temporal or spiritual, this should be our course. "Cast thy burden on the Lord: he will sustain thee."

This is a remedy and support commensurate with all our possible necessities. Nothing

through all eternity can separate those from God, who thus betake themselves to him through Christ in humble, penitent, and obedient faith: and if he be with them and on their side, who can be against them?

No one, therefore, can be so deep sunk in trouble, that he may not be raised and supported by this means. To the disconsolate widow—to the dejected bankrupt—to the wretch labouring under incurable disease, and looking forward to an opening grave—to the exile banished from his country—to the captive immured in the dungeon, "fast bound in misery and iron"—to him whose every earthly hope has perished, we may say, "Hope thou in God!" and addressing to each this exhortation, we address to him that which is adequate to all the exigencies of his case. Yes, and blessed be God, many suffering under one or other of all these severe afflictions, have found "hope in God" sufficient for their support. May you, dear brethren, seek and find the same, to your great and endless comfort!

SERMON III.

JOHN VIII. 9.

AND THEY WHICH HEARD IT, BEING CONVICTED BY THEIR OWN CONSCIENCE, WENT OUT ONE BY ONE, BEGINNING AT THE ELDEST, EVEN UNTO THE LAST.

THE persons spoken of are those scribes and pharisees, who brought unto our Lord, a woman taken in adultery, demanding his opinion as to the punishment which should be inflicted upon her. Their conduct was insidious, concealing malicious designs under the appearance of respect. "This they said tempting him, that they might have to accuse him." They thought to entangle him in a difficulty from which he could not escape. If he ordered the woman to be put to death, according to the law of Moses, this might not only impeach his character for clemency before the people, but perhaps furnish a handle to charge him before the Roman government, with advancing pretensions to sovereignty, and assuming a power to pronounce sentence of death. If on

the other hand he dispenses with that sentence, they would represent him as an enemy to the law of Moses, and as taking upon him to set aside its enactments. The admirable wisdom of our Lord enabled him, however, not only to escape the snare, but to put his enemies to confusion. At first, "he stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not." But when "they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."

We may be sure our Lord did not mean, that no man ought to act as judge or witness in a criminal cause, who is not wholly exempt from sin in his own conduct; for that would disannul civil government, which is God's ordinance. But he knew the concealed iniquities of these men; and by thus appealing to their consciences in respect of themselves, he made them sensible of the impropriety of *their* taking an active part in this prosecution. A divine power doubtless attended his word, and the effect followed which my text describes. "Being convicted by their own conscience, they went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last." Abashed and confounded, and perhaps alarmed at the apprehension of more particular exposure, they were glad to withdraw, so that "Jesus was left alone,"—

that is, as far as they were concerned, he was left alone,—" and the woman standing in the midst."

On what follows in the history, concerning his dismissing the woman with the address, " Hath no man condemned thee? Neither do I condemn thee: Go and sin no more"—I only observe, that our Lord in this merely adhered to his plan of declining all interference with the duties of the magistrate. He does not mean that he did not duly censure and condemn her misconduct—for the contrary is implied in the charge to " sin no more ; "—but only that he had no judicial sentence to pronounce against her.

In the instance thus brought before us, we have a striking display of the power and operation of conscience. And it is on that subject that I intend to speak.

I shall consider,—

I. THE POWER OF CONSCIENCE.

II. THE HEAVY CHARGES WHICH CONSCIENCE MIGHT JUSTLY BRING AGAINST US ALL: AND

III. What, under such circumstances, IS OUR PROPER RESOURCE.

And, while we consider the subject, may that spirit of conviction from God accompany the word, which shall not merely alarm, but humble and convert our souls !

I. THE POWER OF CONSCIENCE.

I shall not spend time in inquiring particularly into the *nature* of conscience. I understand by it, the mind employed in reflecting upon its own proceedings; in taking cognisance of, and passing judgment upon its own conduct; we all, I conceive, know well enough for practical purposes, what is meant by conscience; and the awful power which accompanies this exercise, or this principle of the mind, is the point to be now illustrated.

In reviewing this passage of our Lord's history, the excellent Bishop Hall exclaims, 'O wonderful power of conscience! Man can no more stand out against it, than *it* can stand out against God. The Almighty, whose substitute is seated in our bosom, sets it on work to accuse. There is no denying, when that says we are guilty: when that condemns us, in vain are we acquitted by the world. With what bravery did these hypocrites come to set upon Christ! With what triumph did they insult over the guilty woman. Now they are thunderstruck with their own consciences, and drop away confounded, and well is he, (among them) that can run furthest away from his own shame. No wicked man needs to seek out of himself for a judge, an accuser, a witness, a tormentor.'

Indeed, when we consider how all the strongest principles of the human heart, must have made these men resist, if possible, such a defeat as they

here sustained, we shall be convinced that the instance before us furnishes a most signal display of the power of conscience.

In the first place, these were comparatively great and principal persons—public characters—"scribes and pharisees:" and for them thus to yield before Jesus,—a mean and despised person,—"the carpenter's son," (as they were wont to call him)—the object also of their particular aversion and opposition—must have been deeply mortifying to their pride.

Again, they were of a class of persons of the highest reputation for sanctity of religious character. "Scribes," the appointed teachers of the people, and "Pharisees," the "straitest sect of the Jews' religion." Yet by thus retiring abashed, not venturing a single word in their own defence, they in effect pleaded guilty to charges which must leave a foul stain upon their reputation.

Yet further, all this took place on a very public stage, and on their own vantage-ground, as they would be apt to regard it. It was "in the temple," where "all the people" were assembled to hear our Lord. Nor is it to be overlooked, that the whole passed in the presence of their prisoner, the culprit whom they accused.

They would moreover have the mortification of reflecting, that they had drawn it all upon them-

selves. It was entirely of their own seeking. It arose out of their attack upon our Lord, and was not any attack of his upon them; indeed, he had been very forbearing. He had shown a reluctance to inflict this wound and disgrace upon them. When they first came to him, "he stooped down, and wrote upon the ground, as though he heard them not." It was not till "they continued asking him," that he "lifted up himself," and uttered the few words which threw them into such confusion.

Finally, their defeat came upon them in the very moment when they expected victory and triumph. They were confident in their case: they thought that our Lord could not escape their snare. His backwardness to answer would increase their confidence. They would attribute it to his embarrassment. How unexpected then, and overwhelming, was it to be thus caught in their own snare, to be so foiled, so exposed.

We see, therefore, that every principle of human nature would have induced them, if possible, to stand their ground; to parry, at least, if they could not repel the attack. But they found it impossible: conscience made cowards of them: it stopped their mouths: it drove them from the field, covered with confusion and disgrace. Yea, the eldest and most honourable only felt most

strongly its rebukes, and led the retreat. " Being convicted by their own conscience, they went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last."

But this, Brethren, is only one among many illustrations, which the Scriptures furnish of the power of conscience. Felix the Roman governor, " trembling " on his tribunal, while Paul the prisoner reasons before him " concerning righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come," is another, and if possible still more striking.

Further, it is written, " the spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear." And this wounded spirit whose anguish is unsupportable, seems to be but another name for remorse of conscience. And how intolerable this is, we learn from the dreadful case of Judas Iscariot. He betrayed his divine master, and sold him into the hands of his enemies for thirty pieces of silver. But when he saw that Jesus did not deliver himself, as he perhaps had expected that he would do by miracle, and that sentence was passed upon him, and was in the way to be executed, then he could no longer endure the reproaches of his own mind. " He brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And he cast down

the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself."

This is an example of awful and desperate remorse of conscience. But there are more salutary ways in which the power of conscience is manifested. Even in such instances, indeed, its reproofs will be painful at the time; but, being duly listened to, they will have a happy event. Such was the case of the Philippian gaoler falling down trembling before the Apostles, crying "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" He presently after "rejoiced, believing in God with all his house." And such also that of the converts of the day of Pentecost: "Pricked in their heart," with the sense of their sins, "they said unto Peter and to the rest of the Apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" nor can language describe the joy with which they received the word of salvation from their lips.

In these instances, indeed, the blessed influence of the Holy Spirit, "convincing of sin," accompanied the operation of conscience, but did not supersede it. For where the Holy Spirit works, it is through the medium of our own consciences, exciting them to do their office, and not acting independently of them.

There is only one thing more, which we shall notice under this head, and that is, that conscience may often slumber long and soundly, in profound

insensibility, and yet may at length arise and discharge its office in a way that shall fill a man with terror, for those offences for which he felt, at the time, no concern.

We have an instance of this, even in a man who had known the fear and love of God, and the influence of true piety. David seems to have passed many months with but few and slight challenges from conscience for his enormous sins, till Nathan the prophet came to him: but after that he says, "My sin is ever before me." "I have no rest in my bones by reason of my sin."

The same was probably the case with the characters in my text. Their sins appear to have given them no disquietude, till the arrow of conviction was directed to their consciences by an unerring hand. So also with the converts of Pentecost and with the jailor of Philippi: and so with the traitor Judas. He pilfered from the bag habitually, and, as far as appears, without remorse; and probably he "rejoiced in his gain of the thirty pieces of silver," at one period of that very day on which he cast back the price of blood with horror, and then laid violent hands upon himself.

Flatter not yourselves, O sinners, because at present you live at your ease, strangers to all remorse. Though your consciences be now, in

the strong language of scripture, even "seared as with a hot iron"—yet is all their exquisite sensibility capable of being so restored in a moment as to make you "a terror" to yourselves. These awful feelings may overwhelm you in the hour of sickness or of death, and if not, they will at least surprise and confound you in the day of judgment.

But it is not only against persons guilty of notorious sins, that conscience is capable of bearing an alarming testimony. If God should be pleased at once to enlighten our minds to a just knowledge of his law, and of our own manifold failures and offences in thought, and word, and deed; and to let loose our consciences upon us; our convictions would be terrible, and we should all be driven to exclaim, "Thou makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth. Innumerable evils have compassed me about! My sins have taken such hold upon me that I am not able to look up: and my heart hath failed me."

II. To OFFER SOME PROOF of this, and by so doing, to draw the subject home to ourselves, is the second thing proposed.

Let any one then consider how wrong a spirit has existed, and how many wrong dispositions have prevailed in him from his childhood. Indeed, in consequence of the fall of man, we all come

into the world, with these wrong dispositions in our hearts. We are naturally disinclined to God's service, and inclined towards the world, and sin, and folly. Hence we are from the first, as soon as we become capable of it, in our conduct, "foolish and disobedient, serving divers lusts and pleasures." We do not serve God—but the contrary. Has not this been the case, at least during a large part of life?

Towards our fellow-creatures, how many wrong tempers have wrought within us: pride, envy, anger, malice, selfishness, uncharitableness. If we watch ourselves diligently, we must be convinced how remote our temper has been from loving all men "as we love ourselves," how different our conduct from "doing to them as we would they should do unto us." So much so, that we are apt to let these laws of God quite escape our thoughts, and to govern ourselves by some very different rule.

Another view of the subject, which may readily show us the multitude of our offences, if we properly consider it, is, reflecting on our sins of *omission*. We are apt to think only of the instances in which we have positively '*done* those things which we ought not to have done,' overlooking the innumerable multitude of cases in which we have '*left undone* the things that we ought to have done.'

Particularly when we come to apply this reflection to all the different relations in life, in which we have stood, as children or parents, as brothers or sisters, as masters or servants. When we consider how we ought to have filled up all these relations, so as to have promoted the honour of God, and the good, spiritual as well as temporal, of all with whom we have been connected; that all should have been the better for us—better prepared for heaven by our means, and how little, perhaps, we have even thought of such a thing; if we consider this, we must surely become convinced that our failures are "more in number than the hairs of our head." Accordingly we see even the best characters of Scripture, under the influence of an awakened and enlightened conscience, and under the convincing energy of the Holy Ghost, expressing the deepest sense of their own sinfulness and unworthiness. I need do no more than mention to you the names of Job and David, of Isaiah and Daniel, of St. Peter and St. Paul. When Job beholds the glory of God, he says, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Isaiah exclaims in the presence of God, "Wo is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of un-

clean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." St. Paul was "alive without the law once," but, he adds, "when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." And what are our own confessions and our own prayers? Do we not confess our sins, and ask forgiveness as often as we pray for daily bread? And if we thus daily and hourly transgress—if the best things that we do have somewhat in them to be pardoned, and if "in many things we offend all," then how great, and even passing calculation must be the catalogue of our transgressions for the whole of life! Oh should God commission our consciences to awake, arise, and set in order before us, all that we "have done," and all that we have "left undone," who should be able to abide it? "Who can tell how oft he offendeth? If thou, Lord, shouldst be severe to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who shall stand?" We have all done enough to ruin our souls, and most justly to bring upon ourselves God's wrath and everlasting damnation. If we feel it not, if we admit it not, it only shows that our consciences are yet unawakened, callous, and insensible. It makes our state but so much the worse, and not the better: and the most awful thing that could befal us would be, not to be awakened from this insensible state till death

and judgment arrive; and then to have our conscience arise and charge home our guilt upon us, when it is too late to seek for mercy.

III. The question then arises, and a most interesting question it is to us all: What ought to be the course taken under this consciousness of guilt, great enough to condemn us, and at any moment to strike us speechless before God? What provision may we make against conscience becoming a terror to us on a sick and dying bed—or in some other season of extremity? In what way obtain well-founded peace of conscience notwithstanding our sins? This is the third thing to be considered, and here let us turn again to the history.

When these men were "convicted by their own conscience" they made haste to withdraw from the presence of Christ. A similar feeling led our first parents to conceal themselves from the presence of God among the trees of the garden. Thanks be to God, however, all this is needless: and the gospel of Christ shows us that our safety consists in flying *to* God, even with all our sins about us, that he may take them away, not in flying *from* him. Accordingly the excellent prelate before quoted, observes upon the case before us: 'No sooner do these hypocrites hear of their

sins from the mouth of Christ, than they are gone. Had they been sincerely touched with a true remorse, they would rather have come to him upon their knees, and have said, Lord, we know and find that thou knowest our secret sins: this argues thy divine omniscience. Thou that art able to know our sins, art able to remit them. O pardon the iniquities of thy servants! Thou that accusest us, do thou also acquit us! But now instead hereof they turn their back upon their Saviour and haste away. An impenitent man careth not how little he hath, either of the presence of God, or of the mention of his sins. O fools, if ye could run away from God, it were somewhat, but whilst in him ye live and move, what do ye? whither go ye? ye may run from his mercy, ye can but run upon his judgment.'

Brethren, the whole of that which is our true wisdom and duty is implied in the passage just recited. We can neither fly from God—nor permanently from our own consciences. Inconsideration can only make our case worse. Extenuating our sins, only aggravates our guilt. Be it then ever remembered that our danger, our ruin lies not in all the number or magnitude of our past transgressions, great as both one and the other are; but only in our present *impenitence*, and neglect of the Saviour. The least sinner that continues

impenitent must perish: the greatest sinner truly repenting and unfeignedly believing, shall be saved.

Be it again remembered, that all our encouragement must be derived not from the smallness of our guilt, or from any compensation that we can offer for it: And yet abundant encouragement is provided for us: a sure foundation is laid for the confidence, even of the chief of sinners—truly repenting and turning to God. It is found in this—that Jesus Christ is "the propitiation for our sins"—that he is "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world"—"that his blood cleanseth from all sin." That "in him, therefore, whosoever believeth is justified from all things."

Know then, that it is in vain to dissemble and cloke our sins—to shun the consideration of them—to attempt to forget them. That is the very opposite of "the way everlasting." It is an expedient that can last only for a time. "Be sure," O sinner, "thy sins will find thee out." "Are they not all noted in God's book?" Yes, and he will one day bring them to light to thy utter confusion and dismay; if they are not previously forgiven and blotted out.

Since then, our sins will certainly one day "find *us* out," our wisdom and our duty are now

to trace *them* out, as particularly as we can, "to consider our ways:" "to call our sins to remembrance:" to look at them in all their guilt and aggravation: to pray for the awakening, convincing grace of God's Spirit: that we may, now in the time of this mortal life, so learn to apprehend the heinous nature of our offences against God, that they may not at a future day rise up eternally to confound and condemn us. And having done this, what are we to do with respect to them? nothing else than to fall down before God confessing them all unreservedly, and pleading, 'for thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, forgive me all that is past'—"hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities! Remember not against me the sins and offences of my youth!" It is promised that if we thus "confess our sins" with a 'humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart,' that then 'God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' On this blessed assurance we may rely with humble confidence, and thus "being justified by faith, we shall have peace with God, through Jesus Christ our Lord," and instead of trembling under the apprehension of the wrath of God, justly due to our offences,—may rejoice in hope of the glory of God. In this way, and in no other, will peace

of conscience be secured to us, and effectual provision made that conscience shall not be a terror to us when we can least bear it.

All this is abundantly illustrated to us in scripture, in the parables of the Pharisee and Publican, and the Prodigal, and in the cases of Manasseh, and of David, and of many others. Let the testimony of David serve instead of many, "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long." "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." And hence, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered."

1. And now, brethren, after this illustration of the subject, may I not justly call you to thanksgiving to God for his holy gospel; a system which does away all necessity, and almost all temptation, to dissemble and cloke, to excuse or extenuate our guilt; and all temptation to fly to a distance from God under the sense of it: which lays a foundation of hope, even for the chief of sinners, and invites all alike to return unto God, "for he will abundantly pardon." Oh then let us make use of it, each one for himself, and return unto God, and in him, to peace and blessedness.

What thankfulness is due from the Christian

who has done so—who, taught by the gospel, can combine together such sense of his sins and abasement before God with filial confidence!

But secondly, though the gospel is "to purge our conscience from dead works" and from the guilt of all our sins, by the atoning blood of Christ alone, yet this is not to render us careless of contracting guilt; but it is that we may "serve the living and true God." Though the greatness of his guilt is no obstacle to the true penitent's forgiveness, yet every one who finds the pardon and peace of the gospel, will henceforth "exercise himself to have always a conscience void of offence towards God and man." Though we shall be always imperfect, and shall put no confidence in anything that we do, yet if we would for the future maintain a blessed confidence towards God, we must have the "testimony of our conscience that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have our conversation in the world."

Finally, let me address one word more to those whose peace arises only from forgetfulness and inconsideration, while they yet live in sin. See in the instance before us, how the Saviour even in the days of his humiliation, could by one word spoken, so awaken the recollections and alarm the consciences of these men, that they could not conceal their confusion. What then, think you, will be

the case when he shall come again in his terrible majesty to judge the quick and dead? or even at a still nearer time, when he shall come by death to require your souls of you? You may sin, and forget your sins: but he will then bring you to an awful account, and your own awakened consciences shall become your accusers, and shall make you anticipate his awful judgment, and shall torment you before the time. Oh, in how much stronger a light will your broken sabbaths, your neglected opportunities, your unhallowed pleasures, your stifled convictions then appear! Oh learn to revere your consciences now, and to yield to their dictates. Seek now to have your "hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience" by the blood of Jesus, and by his purifying Spirit, that they may never become your tormentors, but that you may another day rejoice in their approving testimony, and meet your Lord in peace at his coming. Amen!

SERMON IV.

PSALM XXXII. 5.

I ACKNOWLEDGED MY SIN UNTO THEE, AND MINE INIQUITY HAVE I NOT HID. I SAID, I WILL CONFESS MY TRANSGRESSIONS UNTO THE LORD: AND THOU FORGAVEST THE INIQUITY OF MY SIN.

THE Psalmist seems to have anticipated the benefit which all pious readers would derive from the relation which he, in this Psalm, gives us of what had passed in his own mind. Hence he inscribes the composition MASCHIL, or *Instruction:* and, having delivered the intended account of himself, he remarks, at verse 6, "For this," i. e. admonished and encouraged by such examples as this, "shall every one that is godly, pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found." Under the most distressing circumstances of outward trouble, and even of inward guilt, such characters shall be emboldened to betake themselves untoGod in prayer, and whenever they do so, experience shall teach them, that, whatever their fears may have suggested, it is "a time when God may be found."

And the event has by no means disappointed

these anticipations. He has here given us such a lively description of the miseries of guilt, of the way in which forgiveness is to be found, of the readiness of God to pardon, and of the blessedness arising from the sense of his forgiving love, as I believe has been found highly profitable to all devout persons ever since.

The Psalm describes three distinct conditions of mind, together with the writer's progress from the one to the other of them. The first, is a state of GUILT—sullen and to a great degree impenitent guilt. The second a state of CONTRITION, penitence, and ingenuous confession of sin. The last is a state of REJOICING, in reconciliation with God and the sense of his favour.

These three states of mind we shall consider in their order, endeavouring to make a practical application and improvement of what may suggest itself to our observation under each.

I. THE FIRST STATE OF MIND the Psalmist thus describes from his own bitter experience—"When I kept silence, my bones waxed old, through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me. My moisture is turned into the drought of summer."

"He kept silence." He had committed sin; and the sense of guilt had seized his conscience.

Under these circumstances, instead of ingenuously confessing his sin, he preserved a sullen "silence." Instead of betaking himself to the divine mercy as his only and his sufficient refuge, he imitated the conduct of fallen Adam, who fled from the presence of God, to hide himself among the trees of Eden. Or as Jonah, when he rebelled against the commandment of the Lord, oppressed with guilt and despondency, laid himself down in the sides of the ship, and like a stranger to prayer, strove to forget his misery in sleep, even when the seamen were calling, every man upon his God. Thus David "kept silence," from the acknowledging of his transgression—from the confession of his sins.

Miserable indeed is the mind of man when it thus shuts itself up, shuns the presence of God, and despairs of obtaining help from him—or at least dares not, or is unwilling to seek it; trembles under the sense of his displeasure; can enjoy no communion with *him*—the fountain of all true happiness—is agitated by remorse, yet not softened in penitence, but fretful and rebellious; like Ephraim, bearing chastisement "as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke:" unable to forget its sorrows, yet flying from the only remedy of them.

The best that can be hoped for the mind in this situation is, that God should repeat and augment his correction, till the stubborn Spirit is broken

and bowed down before him in submission and penitence. Any more speedy and less painful issue of its distresses must be considered as highly perilous to its immortal welfare.

This was the course which it pleased God to pursue with David, and the miseries of the sufferer under such discipline are here strikingly described. "When I kept silence my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer."

There are two cases in particular, in which the mind may fall into this state. One is that of a sinner first awakened to some just sense of his offences against God.

A man who has lived all his days, devoted to the pursuits and pleasures of the world, without any serious abiding regard to God, to his soul, and to eternity: is through the hearing of the Gospel, the reading of the Scripture, or by some afflicting Providence, at length impressed with those truths, which, though he might not deny them, were before to him but as idle tales. "He regarded them not." He now feels the worth of his soul: the awful importance of death, judgment, and eternity: his conscience is awakened, he sees the sinfulness of his past life, a life in which to say no more, God and his soul have been neglected; a

life which has been wasted on vanity and trifles, to the neglect of all that is of infinite moment. Alas! how many lead such lives with remorse! Conscience reproaches the sinner with all the long catalogue of his transgressions, his broken sabbaths, his wasted opportunities, his criminal indulgences, his unimproved talents, his unfulfilled duties. Before, he could easily satisfy any misgiving by the trite remark, that God is merciful. Now he views him as a God of justice and holiness, the avenger of sin, who will call the trifler and the transgressor to a severe account. His heart dies within him: he trembles at the apprehension of the wrath to come. As yet he sees not the mercy of God revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord, or how his mercy may be exercised consistently with his justice through the atonement of the Redeemer; or at least he is not sufficiently humbled to make those full and ingenuous confessions of guilt which the gospel requires; to abandon all hope from every other quarter, to submit himself to the righteousness of God, to seek and to accept salvation as a free gift to a guilty criminal. He goes therefore in the bitterness of his soul. He dreads to feel, and therefore endeavours to forget his guilt. He flees from God, and "keeps silence," instead of humbly betaking himself to him through Christ.

Such has been the experience of many a Chris-

tian, before he found the peace and hope of the gospel. Thus far, too, it is to be feared many have gone, who never came to true repentance, and never attained peace and hope on Christian grounds; but either succeeded in losing their serious impressions in the hurry of business and pleasure; or healed their wound slightly by insufficient expedients.

The other case in which much of this state of mind may be experienced, is that of the soul which is not altogether a stranger to God and to piety, but has again in some degree departed from him and fallen into sin, and does not immediately return to him in the renewed and explicit exercise of penitent and believing application to the blood of sprinkling.

Such was the case of David in the Psalm before us; and such was the case of Jonah which has been referred to. Both these, we are warranted to presume, were already men of piety. Both had, we may believe, found forgiveness repeatedly, and walked in the light of God's countenance. One would suppose that he who had once learned the way of forgiveness, and known the blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered, should never again allow himself to lie for any continuance under the guilt of unrepented sin, and the consequent frown of his

God: the misery of such a condition being so great, and such ample provision being made for deliverance from it. But alas! there is not in man this wisdom, or this towardness of disposition; and sin bewilders, debases, and enslaves the spirit. He who commits sin, so far blinds his understanding and hardens his heart; he, so far, estranges himself from God, becomes the prey of guilty fears and perverse inclinations. Even the pious Christian, therefore, who knows that they who depart from God forsake their own mercies, and knows the gospel salvation,—even he is in these circumstances still prone, contrary to his better judgment, to flee to a distance from God and "to keep silence." It is easy even for a good man by negligence and unwatchfulness to fall into sin and consequent misery: but not so easy for him to arise and regain the paths of righteousness; not so easy to betake himself to the Saviour, and through the penitent and believing application of his atoning blood to recover peace of conscience, and with it renewed liberty in the service of God. No, he will need that same grace of the Holy Spirit of God, which first quickened him from death in trespasses and sins. But O let him, and every one who begins to feel the burden of guilt, make haste to seek this: there is no good reason for his delays; while he lingers he only prolongs his

misery and increases his danger. His guilty fears do but impose upon him, while they suggest that there is "no help for him in his God." In the mercy of God his Saviour there is abundant help for him, though there is none to be found elsewhere. Let him consider and be instructed by the experience of David.

II. Proceed we to THE NEXT STAGE OF IT.—This is described in the words of my text. "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and my iniquity did I not hide, I said I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord."

This was a very important change in the state of the writer's mind. He no longer "kept silence." His sullenness, his obduracy, his despondency, were gone: and were succeeded by the happy resolution to take all the blame upon himself; to cast himself upon the mercy of God, and ingenuously to confess his sins before him; offering for them no excuse, no palliation, no apology. "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord:" and, accordingly, he "acknowledged his sin, and his iniquity did he not hide."

Oh happy is it when the guilty mind comes to this resolution! Then the great point in contest between God and the sinner is yielded as it ought to be. Then the soul is brought into that very

posture and condition which are requisite to the right reception of the gospel, and the attainment of its blessings. This is the sacrifice of a broken and contrite spirit which God will not despise. This is the state to which the scriptures every where labour to bring us; and to which they every where speak encouragement. This is the state to which Ephraim was brought when the bowels of divine mercy yearned over him, and again acknowledged him as a child. (Jeremiah xxxi.) "Surely, saith the Lord, I have heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus: Thou hast chastized me and I was chastized, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: Turn thou me, and I shall be turned. Surely after that I was turned, I repented, and after that I was instructed I smote upon my thigh. I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth." "Is Ephraim," the Almighty immediately interposes, "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? I do earnestly remember him still: my bowels are troubled for him: I will surely have mercy upon him." This too, was the state of the prodigal when he resolved, "I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." This the very state which

our Lord describes in the case of the publican, whom he holds up to us as a pattern of the spirit and temper in which we sinful creatures ought to draw nigh to God, if we would obtain justification and salvation. "He would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast and said, God be merciful to me a sinner." This, in short, is true repentance; and it will infallibly connect with true faith in the Saviour, and issue in newness of life.

Contemplate then a moment the change which has taken place. See the mind which was before hard, now softened in contrition: the mind which before fled from God, now turning again to him, and seeking all its relief from him: the mind which before felt only its miseries, and rebelled against the hand that inflicted them, now feeling its sin and submitting to correction: the mind which before "dissembled and cloaked its sins," now confessing them with a humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart: the mind which before indulged sullen despondency, now exercising hope in the mercy of God. Happy spectacle! the angels of heaven contemplate it with joy and congratulation. The eye of God himself rests upon it with approbation and delight. "This my Son was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found!"— It is already in good measure turned to God and

converted: already it manifests not only repentance, but faith—for it renounces all other confidences to trust solely in the mercy of God in the way in which he is pleased to show mercy: already the love of God appears in it, though not, it may be, in any of its joyous actings, yet in this, that it can no longer bear a state of distance and separation from God, and in this, that it mourns over its offences against him. Thus changed, and thus disposed, it cannot but turn from all its sins, cannot but cease to do evil and learn to do well. Already then it is in the way to salvation, and on the very confines, at least, of happiness: "For he that confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall have mercy."—So the Psalmist found it: In the very same breath with the words which describe his resolution, "I said I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord;" he goes on "and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."

III. This leads us to consider THE LAST STATE OF MIND into which he now describes himself as having passed. It is that of heavenly tranquillity and joy arising both from the sense of divine favour, and the exercise of devout affections and sweet communion with God.

Nearly all the remainder of the Psalm is occupied in describing the felicities of this condition.—The

first verses are thus employed. The Psalmist writing under the enjoyment of the consolations of peace with God thus restored, breaks forth, "Blessed is the man," or "O the *felicities* of the man, whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sin is covered: Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile." And having given his history, he in the latter verses again recurs to the same subject, and triumphantly observes, in devout address to God: "Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah!" He describes himself as now secure and happy under the guidance as well as protection of the Almighty, whom he hears (as it were) saying to him: "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way that thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye." On the whole therefore, he concludes, "Many sorrows shall be to the wicked, but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about. Be glad (therefore) in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart!"

Time would fail us to enter at large into the consideration of the blessings which he here describes. Let only their nature and their value be briefly touched upon.

The first is forgiveness of sins. This immediately follows the production of such a disposition as we last considered. Not that there is anything in repentance, or in a disposition thus far right, which can intrinsically merit forgiveness, or in its own right furnish a claim to favour. No! the true penitent renounces every idea of merit. But it has pleased God, having opened the way for the honourable exercise of his mercy through the sacrifice and mediation of Christ, to promise forgiveness of sins and restoration to his favour to all those who seek it in this way. He gives it therefore freely according to the riches of his grace.

And oh! how invaluable a blessing is this—the "forgiveness of sins." Whatever they may think of it who make light of sin, and are blind to the number and aggravation of their transgressions, let him speak the value of forgiveness who, like the Psalmist has known the miseries of guilt, who has learnt to compare himself with the divine law, and thus to estimate the multitude of his offences: who has learnt to feel the importance of death, judgment, and eternity, to tremble at the divine wrath and to count the favour of God better than life itself. He will feel the meaning of David's exclamation, "Blessed is the man whose iniquity is forgiven, whose sin is covered." Oh how will

he feel it who makes the transition from the first to the last of those conditions of mind which the Psalm describes.

Again, here is the blessing of enjoying communion with God by means of prayer. What David considers "every one that is godly" as enjoying, that no doubt he enjoyed when God had forgiven the iniquities of his sin. "Every one that is godly," saith he, "shall call upon thee in a time when thou mayest be found." What constitutes the supreme blessedness of the saints in light appears to be uninterrupted, unrestrained communion with "the Father of Spirits:" and this enjoyed in a measure, by saints on earth, is what constitutes to them "the earnest of their heavenly inheritance."

Thirdly: here is the blessing of divine teaching and guidance, and what is allied with it, of sanctifying grace—to lead them through all the dark and dangerous paths of this sinful world, to fit them for and to conduct them to the regions of eternal joy. "I will instruct thee," the Almighty promises, "and teach thee in the way that thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye."

Lastly: here is protection and defence against every danger and evil: "Thou art my hiding place, thou shalt preserve me in trouble: thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliver-

ance:" surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh to such an one. In the time of trouble he shall have a refuge, an all-sufficient refuge. When he passeth through the valley of the shadow of death he shall fear no evil: God shall be with him: when he standeth before the bar of judgment, the Judge himself shall acknowledge him: he shall say unto him, "Come, thou blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for thee from before the foundation of the world." Thus shall mercy "compass him about" that trusteth in the Lord: let him therefore be "glad in the Lord and rejoice:" and let "all such shout for joy as are upright in heart."

Thus then we have considered the three states of mind described in the Psalm, and the Psalmist's progress from the one to the other. From the connection in which they stand we learn that the only legitimate way of passing from the state of guilt and misery to that of spiritual peace and comfort, is through the state of penitence and unreserved casting of ourselves on the divine mercy. This is the progress of the Christian from the time of his first entrance on the divine life. He becomes, more or less, deeply sensible of his sinfulness and misery; he is led in the way of repentance and faith in the mercy of God through a Saviour, to hope, and peace and joy in believing.

Similar experience is often repeated in the course of his spiritual progress: whenever he again contracts guilt, he will again recover peace and happiness only in the same way. The path of a sincere Christian though it begins with penitential sorrow and mourning, yet, if he follow on to know the Lord, shall end in peace and consolation. For "the path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

But there are many to whom all these views of religion, as entering so much into the feelings of the mind, as so much interesting and affecting the heart, operating so much upon its sorrows, its joys, its hopes and its fears, appear enthusiastical. The objection, we are convinced, is perfectly unfounded: but suffice it for the present to observe, that it is enough for us if these views correspond with those of the scriptures. The scriptures, we are convinced, are from God; from them, therefore, exclusively, we desire to derive all our religious instructions; and what we have now described is what we trust is fairly suggested by the Psalm, and supported by the general tenor of the sacred volume.

But there are those who not coming forward with so broad an objection against the whole of our doctrine, may yet think the idea is to be exploded, that such poignant sorrow for sin, such

mournful confession; in short, such personal and deep repentance is necessary for us all. This Psalm, they may suppose, refers to David's notorious fall in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah; and for those who have lived profligate lives, or who have committed such crimes as David there fell into, they think such repentance may be very proper, but not for the virtuous and comparatively innocent. But let those who entertain such sentiments recur to the scriptures; let them examine whether Job, and Isaiah, and Daniel, and all the most approved characters, even those against whom there lie no specific charges whatever, did not in like manner "abhor themselves and repent in dust and ashes:" and whether this spirit is not, as we have stated, that which is especially pronounced blessed by the gospel; and whether the opposite is not that which is considered as most effectually excluding us from the blessings of Christ's salvation: and finally, whether our church does not in her confession, and in every part of her service, suppose such repentance to become us, and lead us up to the throne of the heavenly grace in the unequivocal profession of it.

Again: the gay and thoughtless world, who are strangers to any spiritual anxieties, may be ready, when they hear a David, or when they hear a serious Christian bemoaning himself for his sins,

as is done in this Psalm, to bless themselves that they are troubled with none of these unaccountable distresses. But let them ask themselves whether they are not at the same time equal strangers to all that stable and sublime consolation which is described in the Psalm. Know they any thing of the blessedness of the man whose iniquity is forgiven and whose sin is covered? Know they anything of the blessedness of being able to look up to God as their gracious Father and friend? Can they retire and reflect with any satisfaction? Can they look forward to death, judgment, and eternity, with peace and hope? Can they indulge any well-founded confidence that "when their earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved they have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens? or are they not, in order to escape uneasiness, forced to stifle reflection? Do they not live without seriousness? Oh they, *they* are the pitiable, the miserable men. There is no way to salvation but by penitence and faith—but to the repentance and faith of the gospel you are equally strangers. The penitent mind in the utmost depth of sorrow into which it may in any gloomy hour, fall, or even he in whom a sense of guilt may be only preparing the way, (so to speak) for penitence not yet fully attained, is enviable compared with you. He may weep and

lament while you may rejoice; but his mourning shall be turned into joy, when your mirth shall have issued in the blackness of darkness for ever. O then be persuaded to consider your ways: forsake the wicked, the careless, the thoughtless, the worldly-minded, and live. Choose now affliction, if affliction be necessary, with the people of God, that you may be "comforted also with their endless, boundless consolation:" rather than to enjoy the "pleasures of sin which are but for a season."

To those who may be suffering under the sense of guilt and the apprehensions of the divine displeasure, let me repeat the exhortation to observe and to imitate the course which David at length so happily took. "Keep not silence." "Dissemble not, nor cloak" your sins. Do not strive to depart from God, but flee to him without delay. Let neither the hope of making some compensation for your faults, or of previously amending your state, or even of attaining more deep repentance, at once hinder or retard you. Betake yourselves to God in Christ; fully and ingenuously confess your sins unto him: confess them as it were over the head of the great Christian sacrifice, Jesus Christ. Rely only on his atonement and the mercy of God conveyed through it: thus will God also "forgive the

iniquity of *your* sin and compass *you* about with songs of deliverance."

Finally: Do you enjoy peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ? Walk then carefully and circumspectly; watch unto prayer; guard against negligence and every act of disobedience, everything that might grieve the Spirit of God or wound your own conscience. David was a man highly favoured of God, who attained great heights of devotion and of holy joy; but sin—but negligence—but the want of watching and prayer plunged him into what guilt you all know, and into what misery this Psalm discovers to you. Here too see how difficult it is, even for the pious mind, to return again to the paths of life, having once strayed from them. Obey then the charge of the Almighty, who promises that he will guide you with his eye. "Be ye not as the horse or mule which have no understanding,"—perverse and wayward; but on the contrary, ever be ready to follow his heavenly guidance; to submit to all the directions of his word—to observe all its cautions—to obey all its precepts, and then rejoice in the Lord, and be of joyful gladness.

SERMON V.

JOHN III. 18.

HE THAT BELIEVETH ON HIM IS NOT CONDEMNED: BUT HE THAT BELIEVETH NOT IS CONDEMNED ALREADY, BECAUSE HE HATH NOT BELIEVED IN THE NAME OF THE ONLY BEGOTTEN SON OF GOD.

SOME persons like not the preaching of faith: others avow that they do not understand it: and both are apt to think, that, in insisting so much upon faith, we undervalue, if we do not even supersede good works.

Now I would earnestly intreat both these descriptions of persons seriously to observe, how very much the Sacred Scriptures say concerning faith; the stress which they lay upon it; the importance which they assign to it.

Let the passage of my text be taken at present, as the single example. It is part of our Lord's very solemn and impressive discourse with Nicodemus. Now hear the fourteenth and four following verses. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in

the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that *whosoever believeth in him* should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that *whosoever believeth in him* should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. *He that believeth on him*, is not condemned: but *he that believeth* not, is condemned already, *because he hath not believed* in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

Now can we preach faith with more repetition than this? Can we give more importance to it, than is done by thus inseparably connecting salvation with faith, and perdition with the want of faith? And the scriptures at large are in the same strain.

What saith the most ancient of the sacred writers concerning Abraham, in a passage, which for its importance, is repeatedly quoted by the Apostles? "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed tc him for righteousness." What saith the prophet Habakkuk in a passage, in like manner, repeatedly cited in the New Testament? "The just shall live by faith." What was the testimony of John the Baptist, the forerunner of our Lord? We have it recorded at the end of this chapter, in

these remarkable words: "*He that believeth on the Son* hath everlasting life; and he *that believeth not* the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

Faith was ever that quality which our Lord marked with peculiar approbation in those who applied to him; and the quality to which he especially ascribed the success of their application. "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great *faith*, no not in Israel." "O woman, great is thy *faith*: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." "Thy *faith* hath saved thee, go in peace." "If thou canst *believe*, all things are possible to him that *believeth*."

What were the words of his parting charge and commission to his disciples, just before he ascended into heaven? "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature: he that *believeth*, and is baptized, shall be saved, but he that *believeth not* shall be damned." What, accordingly was St. Paul's direction to the alarmed gaoler?—"*Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ*, and thou shalt be saved."

The Apostolic epistles are full of this subject. "By grace are ye saved *through faith*." The gospel of Christ is "the power of God unto salvation, *to every one that believeth*: for therein the righteousness of God is revealed, *from faith to*

faith:"—even "the righteousness of God which is *by faith of Jesus Christ*, unto all and upon *all them that believe.*" On the other hand the Apostle pronounces, "*Without faith* it is impossible to please God." And to bring this enumeration of passages to a conclusion, the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews is wholly employed in celebrating the praises of faith: and lest it should be supposed that it was an idle, inactive principle, which he thus sought to exalt, or that insisting on faith was the way to make men neglect good works, he shows that all the excellent characters of scripture had obtained that "good report," which immortalizes their names, by means of their faith, and that their faith was the very and only principle from which their good works sprang.

Now let me intreat those who have hitherto slighted the subject of Faith, to consider all this mass of scriptural evidence respecting it. You must henceforth, if you regard the Divine Oracles, acknowledge the excellence and importance of faith: and all your inquiry ought to be, What is Faith? What do the Scriptures mean by a principle on which they lay such an extraordinary stress?

Nothing can be a more fair and reasonable inquiry than this. I cannot at all wonder that,

to persons entertaining such inadequate notions of Faith, as mankind in general do, it should seem strange to insist so much upon it. It sounds to them like laying a stress upon men's "calling Christ, Lord, Lord," instead of on their "doing the things which he says." But this arises from misapprehension of the subject: and I think all candid persons must admit, that what we should do is, not to insist less upon faith, but to be careful to explain what faith is—or what the Scriptures mean by it.

Now this, my brethren, is what I would aim to do in the present discourse. Let us pray to God, that he would make the attempt successful, and that your hearts may all be opened to receive his truth without prejudice or misapprehension, and in the love of it: that you may know what faith means, and may be enabled "*to believe* to the saving of your souls."

I am to endeavour then to explain to you what that Faith is, on which the Scriptures so much insist.

Most persons, I apprehend, when they hear of Faith, are apt to suppose it means little more than what all of us possess, a sort of historic belief that the facts recorded in the Scriptures took place—and that Jesus Christ is our Saviour, and that his doctrines are true. Little more in short than

such a belief as we have, that there once lived such men as Julius Cæsar and Alexander the Great, who performed many extraordinary exploits, but with whom we have little or no concern.

Now nothing can be more clear than that men may have, and that thousands and millions actually have, such a belief as this, of Scriptural facts and doctrines, who yet live wicked lives, altogether uninfluenced by the principles of the gospel. Such men are, in the strictest sense of the word, "those who call Christ, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which he says:" and they assuredly have, in their present state, no inheritance in the kingdom of heaven.

If this were what is meant by Faith, men might, with great reason, treat it as very unimportant; and be prejudiced against it; or at least, think that insisting much upon it was putting mere notions and professions in the place of obedience to God's laws.

But, my brethren, this is very far indeed from being what the Scriptures mean by Faith. It is precisely what they call a "dead faith," and declare to be of no avail to the salvation of the soul. You are right in disregarding such a mere assent of the understanding which leaves the heart unaffected—but then you are wrong in concluding, that because this is worthless, faith itself is of little importance.

Faith, in a scriptural sense, may be considered, first, generally, as believing all the truths revealed in the word of God; and, secondly, in a more particular manner, as believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now of faith considered more generally, as believing the truths of God's word, we cannot have a finer description, or a better illustration, than is given in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." The Apostle means, that true faith *realizes* to the mind the things believed, and brings the believer to act from regard to them, and under the influence of them. Thus Noah, "being warned by God" of the approaching deluge, believed that the flood would come, and accordingly, "moved by fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his house." Abraham being called of God to leave his country, relying on the Divine promise, "went out, not knowing whither he went." Moses relinquished the treasures of Egypt, and perhaps the prospect of the Egyptian crown, and braved "the wrath of the king," because by faith he "saw Him who is invisible," and "had respect unto the recompense of the reward." Therefore he chose rather "to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."

Now let us apply this account, and these illus-

trations of faith, to those truths which we are especially called to believe. Thus we shall be enabled clearly enough to distinguish between a true lively faith, and that mere nominal belief, which is all that most who profess and call themselves Christians possess.

God has set before us judgment to come, and the awful ruin which will soon overwhelm the ungodly. "The wicked," he says, "shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God." "The hour is coming when all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation." Now we profess to believe these things. 'We believe (we say) that Thou shalt come to be our judge.' What then! do we believe such things and disregard them? Do we live without reference to them? If so, we have no true faith in them. If we are not powerfully affected by them, we do not really believe them, in any Scriptural and important sense of the word. If we do really believe, our faith, like Noah's, will move us, by fear, "to flee from the wrath to come;" to give all diligence to make it sure, that we shall stand when the judge appeareth. Oh, let us not flatter ourselves that we believe, when our conduct is uninfluenced by our faith.

Again: Almighty God has proposed to us as he did to Abraham, exceeding great and precious promises, and a glorious inheritance, of which the land of Canaan, was but a very feeble and imperfect shadow. Now, if we have real faith, we shall do as Abraham and the patriarchs did. We shall "embrace the promises and be persuaded of them," and for the sake of them be, and confess ourselves to be, "strangers and pilgrims upon earth." We shall "set our affections upon things above." Our supreme care will be "to make our calling and election sure." But where is this spirit and this conduct among the bulk of nominal Christians? They are living to this world, and forgetting eternity. Alas! they have no true faith. Let us see that we be not like them. God as much requires us "to come out from the world and be separate," and "to esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches" than all the treasures, and all the honours, and all the pleasures and estimation of the world, as he did Moses. If we have the principle which actuated Moses, we shall with him "renounce the pomps and vanity of a wicked world," as well as "all the sinful lusts of the flesh," not in our vows only, but in our practice. We too shall "choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God," and shall "endure as seeing him who is invisible." And, if we will not

do this, we shall " perish with them that believe not."

Alas! I fear, when we come to explain ourselves, and when the Scriptural doctrine upon the subject of faith is set forth in the judgment of our hearers, we shall be found too strict, and not too lax, to require too much, rather than too little obedience.

Thus much concerning faith in general, as it applies to the various truths of God's word. But men are less backward to form tolerably just notions of faith in that sense, than of what is more particularly styled *faith in Christ*—that reception of him, that reliance on him, as our Saviour, by which (as many of the passages above quoted imply,) we become interested in all the blessings of his salvation.

Now the Scriptures do not furnish us with any such express description of this which is more particularly called *faith in Christ*, as I quoted of faith in general, from the opening of the eleventh of Hebrews. But still they set forth and illustrate its nature to us in a manner, which may at once render it very intelligible, and show its great importance to the serious humble inquirer.

This I shall endeavour to do, by calling your attention to several particular passages.

1. The first is connected with my text. At the

fourteenth verse, our Lord says, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever *believeth in him*, should not perish, but have eternal life."

Now here faith in Christ is evidently compared to the Israelites LOOKING to the brazen serpent for healing. And so the Lord proclaims in the Prophet Isaiah, "LOOK unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth."

What then was implied, when a dying Israelite looked for healing to the brazen serpent, "lifted up in the wilderness?" It was implied that he felt his misery, his danger, his helplessness; felt a conviction that he could receive aid from no other source than that which his justly offended God had, in mercy, provided for him;—that he submitted to God's appointment, and sought help from him in the prescribed way.

So the sinner who believes in Christ for salvation feels his misery, his danger, his guilt, feels that he cannot save himself, that he must owe all his salvation to Christ alone, dying upon the cross for his sins: He "submits to the righteousness of God," thankfully accepts and earnestly seeks the salvation thus provided for him. He looks with earnest desire and expectation unto Christ alone, to pardon, and heal, and save him.

My brethren, you profess to believe in Christ.

I earnestly intreat you to inquire, whether you are thus seeking salvation from him, conscious that you deserve to perish, and are in danger of perishing everlastingly through sin.

2. Let me next direct you to the sixth chapter and the thirty-fifth verse of this gospel. "Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: *he that cometh to me* shall never hunger, and *he that believeth in me* shall never thirst."

Here it is manifest that *believing in Christ* is illustrated by COMING to him. And accordingly it is declared, "He is able to save them to the uttermost, that COME to God by him." And he himself says, "COME unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Believing therefore in Christ is essentially the same with *coming* to him; "coming to him weary and heavy-laden," with the burden of our sins and miseries, "that he may give rest to our souls." It is coming to him as the poor, sick, and lame, and blind, and possessed persons came to him in the days of his flesh, that they might be healed. "Lord, save me, I perish," is its language. He cast out none who thus came: and he has promised that he never will do it.

Prayer is the most direct means of "coming" unto him,—"the prayer of faith." Are we then thus coming to the Saviour from day to day with

all our sins, to be pardoned and subdued, all our wants to be supplied? In all the prayers of our church, and particularly in the holy sacrament, we profess to do it. Those truly evangelical prayers are all (as I may say,) acts of thus coming to Christ, and to God through him. Oh may our hearts go along with them, whenever we use them! And if we indeed "draw near with a true heart" in the house of God, we shall assuredly be doing the same from day to day in our closets. Prayer is the very breath of faith. Faith cannot exist without it. But if we feel not our necessities we shall never come aright to Christ for the supply of them. If we feel not ourselves weary and heavy laden, we shall never come to him for rest. If we feel not our sins and spiritual maladies, we shall never aright seek pardon and healing: in other words, never truly believe in Christ.

3. Again; let me direct your attention to the first chapter of this gospel, the eleventh and twelfth verses. There we read, "He," Christ, "came to his own, and his own *received him not.* But as many as *received him,* to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even to them that believe on his name.*" Here *believing* on Christ, is explained by RECEIVING him, and is opposed to rejecting or "not receiving" him.

He that believes in Christ, *receives* him in all

the characters which he sustains, and for all the purposes for which he came. Receives him as his "prophet" to teach him, and implicitly submits to all his truths; as his "priest," to atone for his sins, and relies on his intercession alone for acceptance with God; as his "King," to protect him and govern him according to his laws. He receives him as "made of God unto him wisdom, righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." He welcomes him with love and gratitude unfeigned, and "counts all but loss for him, that he may win Christ and be found in him, not having his own righteousness, but that which is through the faith of Jesus Christ." He that does not thus earnestly and humbly receive the Saviour, in effect rejects him—at least he "neglects" his salvation, and "how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

4. I will further refer you for illustration of the subject, to the sixth chapter and eighteenth verse of the Epistle to the Hebrews. "That we might have a strong consolation who have *fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope* set before us." Faith is not indeed here expressly named: but every competent judge will allow, that this "fleeing for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us" is in effect the same thing with believing in Christ. And a very expressive illustration this is. There

is an allusion to the cities of refuge among the Jews. The man who had slain another unintentionally, was to flee with all speed to one of these cities; and when he had taken refuge there, then and not before, he was safe from the avenger of blood, who might otherwise slay him wherever he met with him. So are we to flee; so does the true Christian believer flee, with all earnestness of mind, to Christ our only hope and only refuge from "the wrath to come."

Know you then, my brethren, any thing of thus fleeing unto Christ with all the seriousness and earnestness of which your minds are capable? fearing nothing so much as coming short of his salvation? If not, you have yet, it is to be feared, no true faith in Christ. But if you do thus fly to him, and take refuge in him, then are you believers in Christ. Take and enjoy "the strong consolation" which the Apostle declares it to be "the will of God that they should have" who so do.

5. Lastly, St. Paul, 2 Tim. i. 12. has a remarkable passage strikingly illustrative of this faith in Christ, of which we speak. "I know (saith he) whom *I have believed*, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which *I have committed* unto him against that day." Here COMMITTING the soul with all its eternal interests into the hands of the

Saviour, is the same with *believing* in him. And I know not a finer illustration.

The believer in Christ is seriously minded. He has done for ever with that carelessness and unconcern which most men, alas, show for their spiritual state and their eternal interests. He feels the vanity of the world, the importance of eternity, the worth of his soul. That he has here no abiding resting-place—that his home is in the eternal world. He feels moreover that he is a sinner—a miserable sinner: that he has broken God's laws, and is in danger of everlasting damnation. He feels that he cannot restore and save himself. He looks around for a refuge. He hears the Scriptures proclaim, "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world?" "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." "He hath made *him* to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." He finds himself invited to come and receive the blessings of salvation freely from the hands of Christ. He comes unto him, he resigns himself to him, he casts himself into his hands; he "commits" his soul to him to be pardoned, sanctified, and saved, "with an everlasting salvation." He leaves it there, and attains unto peace. Gradually he comes, not only there "to commit" his soul, but "to know" that

he has rightly committed it to one who is "able to keep," and assuredly will keep it "unto that day." He feels himself guilty and unworthy—he comes, not as worthy, but as a miserable lost sinner to his Saviour, and he trusts in his mercy, and grace, and atonement, and intercession alone. In himself he is poor, and miserable, and wretched, and blind, and naked, but in Christ he possesses all things. "Being justified by faith, he has peace with God" now, and he "rejoices in hope of the glory of God" hereafter.

Such is faith in Christ. It is thus to "*look*" unto him, and "*come*" to him for every thing; thus to "*receive*" him with our whole hearts, as our Saviour, from sin and all its consequences; thus to "*flee for refuge*" unto him, from the wrath to come, thus to "*commit*" our souls and our eternal all to his hands, that we may be kept unto that day, and everlastingly saved by him.

Now in conclusion, there are three points to which I must briefly call your attention.

1. The first is, what will be the effects of such a faith as has been now described?

Surely I need say nothing to show what powerful practical effects, must be produced by such a religious belief of all the solemn truths of God's word, as we first considered. If you would see how it will bring a man to live, read the eleventh

chapter of Hebrews. It must lead him to forsake every sin, to practice every duty, to abound in all good works.

And with regard to that particular exercise of mind which is more especially denominated faith in Christ, (an exercise of mind which is to be carefully kept up by the Christian), that *looking* constantly to Christ, that *coming* to him, that earnest and thankful *receiving* of him, that *fleeing to lay hold* of him as our only hope, that earnest *committing* of our souls to him; what does it imply, and what will be its effects? It implies the utmost seriousness and humility of mind, deep repentance of sin, unreserved submission to God, supreme love to the Saviour. And surely in the soul which thus finds pardon, and peace, and the blessed hope of everlasting life, it must most powerfully work, sweetly constraining it by love and gratitude "to live no longer to itself, but to him who died for it and rose again." And this is precisely what the apostle says of Christian faith. "In Christ Jesus" nothing availeth "but faith which worketh by love,"—by love to God, to Christ, to holiness,—constraining the believer to live in all holy obedience. How vain therefore the apprehension, that in preaching faith, we are neglecting good works. We are, in fact, inculcating the only principle which can produce real good works.

And all this is exactly the doctrine of the articles upon the subject. 'That we are justified by faith only,' (say they) 'is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort.' But "good works do spring out necessarily of a true and lively faith, insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known, as a tree discerned by the fruit."

2. The next point is, why the Scriptures insist so much upon faith, and do not merely inculcate obedience. And the answer is, because they are revealing *the religion of a sinner*, and the mode of his return to God. They are not simply teaching good people to continue good, and to do good, but sinners, how they are to be saved, and reconciled to God and to holiness, which is to be by a Mediator, a Redeemer, and by humble dependence upon him, and coming to God through him. Thus only are we to be reconciled to God, and thus only to receive grace to become truly obedient. Our salvation is to be of grace alone, and it is the apostle's observation, "It is of *faith* that it might be by grace."

3. The last point, and to each individual the most important point of all is, Do we possess faith, true faith in Christ. "He that believeth not shall be damned." "He that believeth on him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is

condemned already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God." Oh, let us dread to have these sentences lying against us! But thousands who profess and call themselves Christians, it is manifest have no true faith. We have seen that the common cold assent to Christianity, even though connected with a decent moral life, is nothing like the faith which saves the soul. Thousands know nothing of *coming* unto Christ by faith, of *fleeing* to him for refuge, of earnestly *committing* their souls to him. Have we such a *realizing* belief of Christian truths as gives them their influence upon us? Know we what it is so to come to Christ, and derive all from him? Have we a faith which worketh by love, which makes us love God and delight in his name? Nothing else availeth. It is the gift of God. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

SERMON VI.

COLOSSIANS II. 10.

YE ARE COMPLETE IN HIM.

THE Son of God "manifested in the flesh," and accomplishing the redemption of mankind, is to be esteemed, beyond all comparison, the first and greatest of God's dispensations in this lower world. It formed the subject of the first promise made to fallen man. It was prefigured by types, and foretold by prophets which "had been since the world began." "The testimony of (or to) Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." "To him give all the prophets witness, that, through his name, whosoever believeth in him should receive remission of sins." That the mind and all the powers of the holy apostle were engrossed by this great subject, it is superfluous to shew. "I determined not to know anything among you," St. Paul declares, "save Jesus Christ and him crucified." "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." "God

forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Yea, and St. Peter declares of the holy angels, that "into these things *they* desire to look down." They announced the birth of the Saviour, "as glad tidings of great joy, which should be to all people;" and themselves sang new praises to God for the event; "glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men." And in heaven itself they respond to the never-ending songs of the redeemed, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

Brethren, it is to be feared that after all the assent we give to these things; after all the good words we may use upon the subject; after all that any of us may at times feel; our impressions concerning redemption by the Son of God are imperfect and unworthy in the extreme. We apprehend not "the things which are freely given to us of God" in him. We know not "the breadth, and length, and depth, and height," neither conceive "the love of Christ which indeed passeth knowledge." And our unworthy apprehensions of this subject are attended with very

unhappy practical effects upon us. They prevent our attaining the "peace and joy in believing," which the gospel of Christ is intended to bring to us: and they cause us to fail, in a great degree, of being constrained by the love of Christ to live no longer to ourselves, but to him who died for us and rose again. May the Holy Spirit "glorify Christ" in our view! May Almighty God give unto us "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him," that we may know and enjoy all that is implied in Christ Jesus being "made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption!"

The assertions which the apostle makes concerning Christ, in connexion with my text, are highly remarkable. "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power."

Let us apply ourselves, looking up to God for the grace and illumination of his Spirit, to the consideration,

I. OF THE COMPLETENESS WHICH WE ARE SAID TO POSSESS IN CHRIST, and

II. OF THE CHARACTER TO WHOM THIS COMPLETENESS IS ATTRIBUTED—"*Ye are complete in him.*"

I. When it is said, "Ye are complete,"—*filled —fully filled up*,—"in Christ," we are doubtless to understand that every thing which we sinners can want for our present, and final, and eternal well-being, is amply provided for us in Christ.

What then are the things which fallen, erring, sinful man, needs for his present and eternal well-being? May they not all be summed up in the terms used in a declaration of the apostle's which you have already heard, "Christ Jesus is made of God unto us Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption." Let us then pursue our illustration of the text, under the guidance of that declaration.

1. If we look into the adjoining context we shall find reason to conclude, that one thing specially in the apostle's mind, when he declares our completeness in Christ, is, that we want *no other instructor* to make us "wise unto salvation, and even "thoroughly to furnish us unto every good work." For how is the text introduced? "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men and not after Christ; for in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily," "*and ye are complete in him.*

The first thing that man needs to guide him to happiness evidently is instruction; the knowledge

of God, the knowledge of himself, the knowledge of immortality, the knowledge of the way of peace, and of the path of duty, and "how he ought in all things to walk and to please God," so as 'finally to come to his eternal joy.' This man wants. But where is he to find it? In the sublime language of the book of Job. "Surely there is a vein for silver and a place for gold..... Iron is taken out of the earth, and brass is molten out of the stone..... But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding? ..... The depth saith, It is not in me; and the sea saith, It is not with me..... Destruction and death say, We have "heard the fame thereof with our ears" but that is all. "God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof:" and he hath deposited it for us with his only-begotten Son and with him alone. "In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." "Christ Jesus is made of God unto us *wisdom*." "This is my beloved Son—hear ye him." "No man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him."

But "vain man would be wise," and wise by his own discoveries, "though man be born like the wild ass's colt." And accordingly the philosophers of antiquity, men of the most powerful and most sagacious minds, laboured incessantly

to arrive at a satisfactory knowledge of all those great points which have been mentioned; the knowledge of God, and of man, and of a future life, the knowledge of the way of peace and of final happiness. But they "laboured in the fire and wearied themselves for very vanity." They could arrive at no certainty, could attain nothing satisfactory. One man of great name, and one celebrated sect, did but build up, what another man of great name, and another sect, celebrated for the time, came and demolished. And thus throughout the heathen world, they remained without the knowledge of God and of salvation. The apostle has assigned the reason of the awful fact. "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful," they were suffered to "become vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." "In the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God."

But, even where divine revelation has been vouchsafed, there has ever been a disposition in mankind to forsake that "fountain of living waters, to hew out to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that could hold no waters." The Jews "made the law of God of none effect through their traditions," and "worshipped God in vain, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

Every one in the least degree acquainted with the history of the Christian church knows also how soon that divine institution was corrupted by the vain and criminal attempts of men to improve the light of revelation by the aids of human philosophy. And, under the papacy, what a mass of corruptions, both in doctrine and practice, grew up, and utterly obscured the fair face of Christianity, in consequence of the Church of Rome withdrawing from the sight of men the only true rule and standard of faith, the written word of God, and adding to it, or rather substituting for it, the vain and fluctuating, and fictitious rule of pretended tradition. Even in the time of the Apostles, as St. Paul informs us, this "mystery of iniquity did already work."—And hence the charge connected, as you have heard, with my text, "Beware lest any man spoil you"—*rob* you of your blessedness and great salvation—"through philosophy and vain deceit, after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."

The blessed reformation—blessed we still boldly call it, notwithstanding all the obloquy that is iniquitously attempted to be cast upon it—the blessed reformaton, I say, cleared away all that corruption with which the gospel of Christ had been absolutely overlaid for ages, by the inventions

of men, and restored "the word of Christ" to its just, paramount, and exclusive authority.

But still we are prone to the same error of corrupting the truth, if not by tradition, yet by philosophy, and by what appears *to us* fit, and reasonable, and right, instead of adhering simply to the message, "Thus saith the Lord:" instead of sitting at Christ's feet and hearing his word. Hence we have those who, under the name of 'rational Christians,' will learn just so much from Christ as *they* think reasonable; but where he differs from them, they will differ from him; will receive the word of God where they approve it, and reject it where they do not. And alas! how few are there even leaving those who profess such principles, who are willing, like little children, implicitly to learn whatever Christ is pleased to teach them. But except we "receive the kingdom of God as little children, we can in no wise enter therein."

Yes, and let us, my brethren, rejoice to do so, and count it our *privilege*, and not only our *duty*, to do it; rejoice that we are in point of instruction "complete in Christ," who is "made of God unto us wisdom." Yes, poor, erring, wandering sinner, who art become sensible of thy errors and thy darkness, and thy blindness, and art looking out for some one "to guide thee"—lest thou

'ignorantly wandering miss the skies:' thou who desirest "to find the knowledge of God,"—to "know the truth," that the truth may "make thee free,"—to know the way of peace, and the path of duty and of salvation: seek no teacher but Christ, he is "made of God unto thee wisdom:" thou art completely provided for in him: and he thus graciously inviteth thee unto himself: "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden... Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart"—willing to condescend unto you, and to bear with you—"and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Keep close to his word—and seek the enlightning grace of his Spirit. Make thy daily prayer, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."

2. In the second place, the sinner especially needs pardon of all his sins, and "righteousness" in which he may stand accepted with God. And if we again look into the context we shall find that this is a point also particularly in the Apostle's mind, when he tells us that we are "complete in Christ." So he says at the thirteenth verse: "Having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us, nailing it to his cross:" i. e. by his "obedience unto death," cancelling the deed which bound us over to punishment for our sins. And so in the

other passage from which we are illustrating our text, it is written "Christ Jesus is made of God unto us righteousness." And again, He "hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." All this refers not to making us good, and pure, and holy—of that we shall have to speak under our next head—but of putting away our guilt, removing our condemnation, restoring us to the favour of God, and the inheritance of heaven, as if we had always been good and righteous, and had not sinned.

"How shall man be just with God?" "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow (with acceptance) before the high God?" These are questions of the most solemn importance, and of the most awful difficulty. Man could never answer them to himself.—When we seriously propose them to ourselves, we naturally turn to some goodness and righteousness of our own, which is to make us acceptable to God. He is a pure and righteous Being, and he must be pleased with purity and righteousness in us. True: but then we have not been pure and righteous, but the contrary. Measured by the standard of God's most holy law we are "all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses" are defective and polluted; they cannot stand the severity of God's judgment.

"There is none righteous, no not one;" "in his sight shall no man living be justified."—What then is to be done? 'We must repent.' True: but repentance will not cancel past transgression. It cannot put us in the situation of those who have always obeyed.—'We must endeavour to do better for the future.' True: but if we could do perfectly for the future, that is no more than is due for *that* time, and it cannot supply the deficiencies, or compensate for the offences of the past.—And how know we that we shall be able to do better for the future? Have we so kept our former, that we may rely on keeping our present resolutions? One thing we know, that we shall not be perfect for the time to come: our imperfections will still add to our sum of guilt instead of diminishing it.—What then is to be done? 'We must cast ourselves upon the Divine mercy.' Yes, we must do so, and upon that alone, as those who have 'no health' or help in them, and no plea to offer why they should not suffer the penalty of their transgressions. But then God is a God of justice as well as of mercy: a God of holiness, and a God of truth. He hath denounced vengeance against sin: "the soul that sinneth it shall die." And "hath he said, and shall he not do it? Hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good." His justice must be satisfied, his holiness must be vindicated, the

evil of sin, and his wrath against it, must be marked, before his mercy can be exercised. He is a God of mercy, it is true, but he hath revealed his mercy, and he exercises his mercy in a particular way—through a medium which answers all the ends just pointed out, and exhibits him "a just God, and (yet) a Saviour." That way, that medium, is his incarnate Son, and *his* obedience unto death for us. He has taken our nature upon him, that he might, for our benefit, stand in our place. 'He, for us, obeyed the law in his life: he, for us, paid our ransom by his death.' His sufferings stand in the place of those which we had deserved: His obedience, in the place of that which we have failed of paying, and which should have been our righteousness. 'So that Christ is now the righteousness of all them that truly do believe in him.'[1] The righteousness whereby we are to be justified, and which is to form our *title* to heaven, does not yet remain to be wrought out by our obedience, it was completed when Christ on the cross cried out, "It is finished"—though that which is to make *fit* for heaven must still be wrought in us by the Spirit of God.

Hence, when the awakened, alarmed sinner, asks the question proposed, "wherewith shall I come

[1] Homily.

before the Lord and bow before the high God," so as to find his favour? The Scripture replies, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." Look off from thyself, from all thy own works, past or future, considered as a ground of trust before God. Thou hast nothing, thou canst have nothing of thine own, which can answer this purpose. Seek it not in thyself: seek it not from any inferior source. It is found in Christ alone. For this purpose was he manifested "to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness," for the justification of all them that truly believe in him. He hath "made his soul an offering for sin." "In him God is just, and the justifier of him that believeth." "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "In him whoever believeth is justified from all things." "The righteousness of God." That which he hath provided in and by Christ to supply the place of that which we lacked—"is unto all and upon all them that believe." Look to no other quarter: attempt to mix nothing else with what he has provided: thy own future obedience indeed is necessary, *but not for this purpose*, not as the ground of thy justification in future any more than for the time past. Seek no other hope but "Jesus Christ and him crucified." "YE ARE COMPLETE IN HIM." "He is made of God unto

you righteousness." "Ye are made the righteousness of God in him."

In stating this doctrine, while laying the only foundation of a sinner's peace and confidence, we are not neglecting the interests of personal holiness and obedience, but the contrary. The very nature of that faith, which alone gives us an interest in Christ for justification, effectually secures that point: and that we do not neglect it will appear from the next particular, viz. that—

3. "Jesus Christ is made unto us sanctification," and that in this respect also we are "complete in him."

By sanctification we mean restoration to holiness, goodness, and obedience: not only reformation of the outward manners, but purification of the heart, of the thoughts, the tempers, the affections, that we may supremely love God, and aim to love our neighbours as ourselves.

And that this particular also is in the Apostle's mind is evident from the context. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him;" that is, "in all holy conversation and godliness." "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands;" that is, by spiritual regeneration; "in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh." And then let any one read forward in the next chapter in which the

Apostle proceeds to enumerate and insist upon so many affecting particulars of the Christian temper, and of all Christian duty. "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry." "Put off all these, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth." "Put on as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another." "Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord: Husbands, love your wives and be not bitter against them: Children, obey your parents in all things:" "Fathers, provoke not your children to anger:" "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh." "Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a master in heaven."

Whom Christ justifies by his merits and righteousness, them he also sanctifies by his Spirit. With the promise, "Your sins and iniquities will I remember no more," are ever more inseparably combined the other promises:—"A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you

and I will write my laws in your hearts, and put them in your inward parts; and I will cause (or incline) you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them." So that if any man flatters himself that he is justified by Christ's righteousness, that he is in the favour of God for Christ's sake, and yet lives in sin, he does but deceive his own soul: "his faith is dead;" "his religion is vain;" he is "yet in his sins," and under sentence of condemnation.

And this also is the only way in which fallen man can attain unto holiness, and be made "meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light."

What avail all human resolutions, without divine grace? What have all the rules of philosophy effected towards making men good and holy? What have availed all the observations of monkish austerity and superstition? All have left men the slaves of sin in one form or another—if not of sensuality, yet of pride, and perhaps of malevolence. But "if the Son (of God) shall make you free, then shall ye be free indeed." For by his grace he changes the heart and dispositions, inclines men to love God and choose his service, and not merely to perform it with reluctance and aversion—inclines them *to love* holiness; and therefore they will assuredly practise it; renders them averse to

sin—yea "dead to sin"—and then, "how shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?"

Accordingly, from the time that his gospel went forth in the world, it proved "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth;" it turned them to God from idols, "to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." Wherever it came there were numbers to whom it might be said, as St. Paul says to the Corinthians, after speaking of very grievous sinners, "Such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God."

In this respect then as well as others, "we are complete in Christ," and need look to no other quarter: in turning to any other for the attainment of holiness and personal goodness, as well as for justifying righteousness, we shall but "seek the living among the dead." Christ's rules are the perfect *standard* of holiness; his grace is the only effectual *principle* that can produce it in our hearts and lives.

Ye then who from feeling the power of evil propensities, and the inefficacy of your own resolutions, and the vanity of human rules, and

even the "impossibility" of the divine law restoring you to holiness, are ready to despair of ever becoming good and holy, turn to Christ, and implore from him the fulfilment of the promises of his new covenant, the gift of his Holy Spirit; "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me:" thus shall you obtain liberty and victory.

4. Finally, saith the Apostle in the passage which we have throughout used for the illustration of our text, "Christ Jesus is made of God unto us Redemption:" which here, no doubt, refers not so much to Christ dying for us, "to redeem us to God with his blood," as to his eventually accomplishing in his people the great end of his coming, by forever "redeeming them from all evil:" presenting their souls, "holy, and unblameable, and unreproveable before the presence of his Father's glory, with exceeding joy;" carrying them safe through all the scenes of life, death, and judgment, and eventually redeeming even their bodies "from the power of the grave," and reuniting them with their glorified spirits in God's eternal joy.

On such subjects all that we can say is but as the lispings of children upon things that "pass man's understanding:" we are in danger of "darkening counsel by words without knowledge:" yet the observations which have been made, have, I

trust, been drawn from God's word, and may by his blessing assist Christian minds in estimating their privileges, and in forming some more suitable conception of their being "complete in Christ;"—so complete in him that neither for wisdom, for righteousness, for sanctification, nor for any thing connected with their final redemption, can they think of adding any thing to what is found in him, without dishonouring their all-sufficient Saviour, and injuring their own souls.

II. One point only remains—to inquire to whom individually, we may apply the address, "*Ye* are complete in him," or, in other words, 'Not only is the provision made, but *you* are personally put in possession of the blessing.' And surely this inquiry is most necessary: for since "many are called, but few chosen," can any seriously-minded person be otherwise than anxious to know whether "the unsearchable riches of Christ," are all his own—not only proposed to him, but actually conferred upon him?

Now it is the well-known doctrine of scripture, as has been abundantly discovered in the various passages we have had occasion to quote, that it is *faith* in Christ which puts us in possession of all the benefits which he came to provide for us. "To as many as received him, to them gave he power

to become the sons of God, even to them which believe in his name."

But then we must ever remember what is the nature, and what the effects of that faith which alone secures to us the benefit. It is not a mere acknowledgment of him as the Saviour of the world—a mere calling him, Lord, Lord, and professing his religion—no, not even though this be joined with morality and a good life. It "receives" Christ in the characters and for the purposes which he came to sustain or to execute. It "comes" to him, weary and heavy-laden with the burden of sin, that he may "give rest" to the soul. It "flees" to him for "refuge" from the wrath to come. It "commits" every thing to him. And then constrained by love and gratitude to him for his inestimable benefits, it gives up the whole man to serve him in holiness and righteousness of life. It must be a living and fruitful faith which alone can make us partakers of Christ's benefits: not a dead and barren faith. In Christ Jesus "nothing availeth but faith which *worketh by love.*"

And, as we before intimated, this one scriptural consideration of the nature of that faith which alone justifies and saves, better secures the interests of holiness, and prevents the doctrine of justification by faith alone being abused to the

encouragement of sin, than all other expedients which man has devised—and devised often to the subverting of the foundation of faith altogether.

Would you know then, brethren, whether it may be said to you individually, "*Ye* are complete in Christ," and partakers of all the blessings of redemption? Then "examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith" or not? Have your minds ever been awakened to a sense of sin? Have you ever indeed felt your urgent need of redemption from sin and all its consequences? Have you sought it as the "one thing needful" for you? Have you sought it from Christ alone, saying, "Yea doubtless I count all things but loss ... that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." And does that love to him prevail in your hearts which causes you to serve him unreservedly—aiming to walk in all his ordinances, and commandments blameless?

If so, take and enjoy the consolation provided for you. Then are ye "in Christ Jesus, who

of God is made unto you wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." Then let no man disquiet or seduce you. "Ye are complete in Christ," and need no other teacher, justifier, sanctifier, or redeemer. "Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free." "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving."

Let not even your own consciences disturb you on account of your imperfection and unworthiness, so long as you are not indulging any sin, but watching, and striving, and praying against it, and forsaking it. "These things write we unto you, that ye sin not: but if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." "Ye are complete in him," and "his blood cleanseth from all sin." "Let, therefore, the peace of God which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

"Rejoice," then, O Christian believers, "in the Lord," and let your spirits be joyful in God your Saviour. Dwell much in your meditations on "the things which are freely given unto you of God," in Christ Jesus our Lord, that you may evermore rejoice in the holy consola-

tion which they may well afford you under all circumstances.

And under the sense of your obligations, let your grateful inquiry be, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits?" Go forth, and aim to walk worthy of your high and holy calling, and to glorify God in your bodies and your spirits, which are his. Take the next chapter for your stimulus and your directory. Study its holy exhortations, and seek grace from "the fulness" which is in Christ, to enable you to copy them in all your conduct, and in all the relations of life, and thus be waiting for the coming of your Lord.

SERMON VII.

JEREMIAH VIII. 22.

IS THERE NO BALM IN GILEAD? IS THERE NO PHYSICIAN THERE? WHY THEN IS NOT THE HEALTH OF THE DAUGHTER OF MY PEOPLE RECOVERED?

THE prophet Jeremiah lived on the very eve of the desolation of his country by the Chaldeans, which he both predicted and saw accomplished. In the context, he anticipates the entrance of the Chaldean army into the land, at the northern border. "The snorting of his horses was heard from Dan: the whole land trembled at the sound of the neighing of his strong ones, for they are come, and have devoured the land, and all that is in it, the city, and those that dwell therein." But, though he denounced, he could take God to witness, as every faithful minister can also do, that he had not "*desired*, the woeful day." Even those who suffered under the accomplishment of his predictions, could scarcely feel more keenly than he did, in the prospect of that event. "When I

would comfort myself against sorrow," he says, "my heart is faint in me." He sunk under the effort; "Behold the voice of the cry of the daughter of my people, because of them that dwell in a far country." "Is not the Lord in Zion?" It might be asked, seeing he thus delivered her up to her enemies—"is not her king in her?" The answer, returned as by the voice of God himself, was, "Why have they provoked me to anger with their graven images, and with strange vanities?"

The people are next introduced, mournfully bewailing the disappointment of all the hopes of succour, which they had cherished during the summer season, whether from Egypt, or from any other quarter: "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved!" The prophet then again resumes: "For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt: I am black: astonishment hath taken hold of me." And then, in proverbial language, borrowed from the case of bodily diseases, and the well-known remedies for them to be found in the drugs and the physicians of Mount Gilead, he demands, "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" Was there no remedy to be found for the miseries of his people? Or was not their ruin rather to be ascribed to their own wilful

neglect, or unfaithful application, of the remedies which God had prescribed them? The latter was undoubtedly the fact. Had the people of Judah, as they had so often been called to do, truly repented of their sins, and "turned unto the Lord with their whole heart, and not feignedly;" he would certainly have "returned unto them," and revisited them with mercy; and all their past iniquity "should not have been their ruin."

Such is the connexion and the meaning of the words in the mouth of the prophet.

But now mark how we bring a passage of this kind originally spoken concerning the Jews of old, fairly and legitimately bring it, to apply to ourselves. The case of the Jews in the time of Jeremiah, is but one among a thousand cases which come under the same common description, and to which the same principles apply. For what is the nature of that case? Here is "a hurt," and it is "not healed;" and therefore it proves fatal. And for what reason is it not healed? Not because there is no remedy; but because that remedy is not applied. This was the case of the Jews: and I need hardly point out to you, that it is precisely *one*, in principle, with that of sinners who remain unsaved, notwithstanding all the provisions made by the gospel for their salvation.

I proceed, therefore, as you will perceive I am fully warranted in doing, to apply my text to such cases; and to address to sinners, who yet remain under the guilt and the power of their sins—yea, and to Christian believers also, who do not obtain that peace and victory which they ought to find through the gospel—the demands of my text, "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?"

It is not however to persons who have altogether hardened themselves against religious feeling; nor again to those who are well-satisfied with themselves, with their own state, and character, and prospects, that the words must be applied. Neither of these cases corresponds with that described in my text. The Jews felt their troubles and their dangers, but they were too indolent and undecided, or too averse to it, to apply the proper remedy. They made some efforts for recovery, but these were slight, and fell much short of what the case required. They fasted, but they did not turn from their sins; they offered sacrifices and worshipped at the temple, but they did not yield themselves up to the service of God in righteousness and holiness, and truth. They are charged therefore with "healing their wound slightly:" they merely skinned it over, so to speak, and

made no sound cure, in consequence of which it broke out afresh, and was worse than before.

Now, something closely resembling this, is what numbers are continually doing, in the concerns of their souls, with regard to sin and salvation, I speak not (I repeat it) of persons utterly regardless of religion, but of those who attend the house of God, and read his word at times, and in their manner pray, at least when impelled to it by uneasiness and alarm; and who have their feelings, and their purposes, and their wishes, and who would fain attain peace and salvation, if it could be had upon easier terms, or terms different from those of the gospel.

1. In the first place there are persons whose religion is a religion of *form and ceremony*. They go through their routine of devotion. They attend the church: they read their chapters: they come to the sacrament at certain seasons, and as preparatory to so doing, they abstain from their accustomed pleasures and use their prescribed forms of devotion. But here, or nearly at this point, their religion ends. It is no principle of universal efficacy, seated in the heart, and thence spreading its influence over the whole life. It is essentially different from true Christianity. It has brought with it no conviction of utter ruin by sin; it has produced no "fleeing from the wrath to come;"—

no cleaving to Christ as the sinner's only hope,—and "counting all but loss for him." It has never been able therefore to detach the affections of those who have taken up with it, from the present world: with all their hearts, they love the world still—perhaps even to the last dregs of life; it has never availed to inspire them with the love of God. It is "the form of godliness," but without the power. No victory, no energy, no life, accompanies it. It brings no foretaste of heaven into the soul. It may be attended with little habitual uneasiness; but yet it does not "give peace." It leaves its possessors *afraid to die;* and there are times at which the thoughts of death, and judgment, and eternity, of sin, and of divine wrath, intrude, when the insufficiency of such a religion must be felt. It is a religion of bondage, not of liberty.

My dear brethren, let me entreat you never for a moment to rest in a religion at all resembling this. It can never stand you in stead amid the storms of death and judgment; and you *need not* rest in it. Somewhat better is provided for you. Let your minds be awakened to the subject of our present contemplation.

2. There are others, again, whose religion is less habitual, but much more *vehement* while it

lasts. It is a religion of *occasional strong feelings, and ardent resolutions.* The persons in whom it is found, are habitually living in a manner which is not satisfactory to their own consciences. They know much better than they practise. They have more just views of the nature and extent of true religion than the former class of persons, but their practice is, very possibly, even much worse. At times, by hearing the word of God, by their own reflections, possibly by means of some more flagrant sin which they commit—conscience is startled; it is roused, and protests vehemently against the course they are pursuing, it terrifies them with the thoughts of damnation. They recur, as they have often done before, to prayer. Their prayers, like their purposes, are little less than violent for the time; but both the prayers and the purposes are those of a terrified conscience, not of a renewed heart; therefore they soon pass away without effect. The alarm subsides: the passions revive: temptations assail: and the sinner returns, according to the homely, but striking figure of scripture, as "the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." I fear such a course of sinning and repenting, and returning to sin again, is not at all uncommon. Here again there is *neither peace nor victory* brought to the soul, by such a religion as it is acquainted with. But why

do things remain in this state? Is it because there is no "balm in Gilead?" no adequate remedy, "no physician" that is able to heal, that the sinner is not recovered? That is by no means the case.

3. Again, there is a religion of *sighs and complaints*, rather than of faith and prayer, of vigour and exertion. You may find persons who have some serious sense of sin, and of eternity; who acknowledge all the truths of the Gospel; and feel the duty of serving God. But, instead of being stimulated to action by all they have learnt and acknowledge; instead of arising to flee from threatened evils; to aspire at promised good; to watch and pray; to "fight the good fight of faith, that they may lay hold on eternal life:" instead of this, every consideration which you can urge, tending to such an effect, is repelled and thrown back upon you by—what shall I say? the listless, hopeless, heartless indolence, which envelopes the whole man, as far as all his spiritual interests are concerned. Alas! there is at the bottom of all this too much of the spirit of the servant who complained, "I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: I was afraid therefore, and hid thy talent in the earth." Beware, brethren, that hard thoughts of

God, and a real and utter, however disguised, aversion to his service be not the true source of all this despondency and inertness.

Still there clings to such persons a latent hope, that their religion will prove availing. They think they are to be pitied, rather than to be blamed. They flatter themselves that their sighs and complaints may pass for repentance; that their professed trust in Christ, however inactive and unfruitful, may yet be faith; and they hope that even their despondence is humility. God forbid that I should presume to judge the heart of any individual, or to speak to the grief of one whom God hath wounded; but I must admonish such persons as I have described, that there is great danger lest their hopes should prove delusive. We must "*forsake*," as well as "*confess*" our sins, if we would "have mercy." No faith availeth, but that which "worketh by love." And, though humility distrusts itself, it is not indicated by distrust of the promises of God.

The religion of these persons likewise appears to bring with it neither *peace* nor *victory*.

4. Once more, there is a religion of *faint wishes, feeble endeavours, and unrealized anticipations*. I will explain my meaning. There are many persons—and let me observe, that young people

brought up amid religious society, are very apt to be among their number—whose consciences are on the side of religion; whose conduct exhibits no flagrant violations of its precepts; who pay a decorous attention to its outward duties; but who at the same time have a feeling, a consciousness, that their hearts are not fully subdued to its power—as they must some time be, if ever they are to be saved. They flatter themselves that the time will come when they shall become what they ought to be, and what their pious parents and friends would wish them to see them. They keep hoping for the arrival of this happy event, (for so they consider it,) and they continue to use some means of religion tending towards it. But then this is done feebly, coldly, undecidedly, in a manner which leaves them but where they were—where, perhaps, they have long been: and one year after another finds them but where the preceding found them. Alas! the very hopes which these persons—often amiable and estimable young persons—cherish, serve only to keep them back from being at present what they know they must become. Their very use of the means of grace does but contribute to quiet their consciences in the want of all that decided religion to which it ought to conduct them. They live upon future hopes;—hopes—oh, let the thought deeply impress

their hearts! hopes which *may* never be realized. They too at present are strangers to *peace* and to *victory*, obtained by means of religion.

Now would to God that persons of any, or of all of these characters, might be roused and directed, by the consideration of the present subject, to a better and happier state of mind, to the *peace*, and *liberty*, and *victory* of the gospel. This, brethren, is what above all things we desire for you. Your wound of sin is "not healed:" your spiritual health is "not recovered," your salvation is not achieved. Wherefore? *Because God's remedy is not applied.*

On these then, and on all other descriptions of sinners who continue yet unredeemed from the guilt and the power of their sins, we urge the inquiry, Why remain ye in so sad a state? "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?" Is there no Saviour who is able to redeem and deliver you? Cannot the power and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ reach your case? Is not his blood sufficient to atone for your guilt? Is not his Spirit able to subdue your depravity, and to turn your heart to God? Why then is not your spiritual health recovered?

The two blessings which I have named, are those of which you stand in need—deliverance

from the *condemnation*, and deliverance from the *power* of your sins. Now hear the sure testimonies of Holy Scripture concerning the provision made for *both* these objects.

As to the first, it proclaims, "all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him" on our Saviour, "the iniquity of us all." He hath "made *his* soul an offering for sin" "Him hath God set forth to be a propitiation," to "make reconciliation for iniquity," "that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." "He (Jesus Christ) is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world." "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin."

Hear therefore the invitations which are in consequence given, and the assurances of pardon to all that "come to God by him." "Come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." "Whosoever believeth in him, is justified from all things." "Whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." "We then, as workers together with Him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain."

There is no question that full and free pardon of all your offences, is ready to be extended to you, if you will seek it. There is no obstacle but from within yourselves. You have not hitherto sincerely sought the blessing. "Seek and ye shall find." it; "ask, and ye shall receive" it.

Hear again the assurances given, of deliverance from the *dominion* of sin, and the *power* of depravity, as well as from condemnation. "God "will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him." "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you: *a new heart* also will I give you, and *a new spirit* will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh, and I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them." Brethren, this is no other than a summary of the promises of the gospel. Thousands of sinners in every succeeding age, encouraged by these promises to cast themselves upon the mercy of God in Christ, and thus to plead for the fulfilment of them, have found what you want, pardon and strength, peace of conscience, and victory over sin. Imitate their example, and of you too, it shall be said, as of others who have been most strongly "tied and

bound in the chain of their sins;" "such were some of you, but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God." O blessed and happy change! how different would your state then be, from what it now is! Determine by the help of God not to rest without finding this "pardon and peace that you may be cleansed from all your sins, and serve God with a quiet mind."

But it may be needful to explain a little more particularly the course you are to take, in order to find this blessedness. The sick and diseased who needed "the balm" and "the physician," must go to the physician and take his medicines. So must we "come to Christ," that we may be saved. The simple direction of Scripture is, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," "receive" him as your Saviour; "trust" in him as such; apply to him to be such. As he himself beautifully invites us, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." According to what we have already said, we are to be encouraged by all those promises of Scripture, to cast ourselves unreservedly upon the divine mercy in Christ, pleading that they may all be fulfilled unto us: and if we do this sincerely

and perseveringly, assuredly they *shall* be fulfilled unto us.

That we are utterly *unworthy*, is no ground even of discouragement. What would be the meaning of such promises as these? "From all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you"—"though your sins have been as scarlet, they shalt be white as snow," if unworthiness formed any bar to our reception? Such promises could have *no* meaning, *no* application, but in the case of the utterly unworthy—of those who *deserved* God's wrath, not his favour. We are to come as utterly unworthy, deeply guilty, and in ourselves undone. "O Israel, thou hast *destroyed thyself*, but in me is thy help:" this is the nature of God's address to us.

Further, that we have proved our own *weakness*, and the utter inefficacy of all our resolutions to become good, this need be no obstacle to our thus coming to the Saviour, with lively hope and expectation. It is appointed that "we should thus "have the sentence of death in ourselves," not in order that we should despair, but that "we should not trust in ourselves, but in God that raiseth the dead." Once more:—it is true that in the passages which have been recited, we read of "walking in God's statutes, and keeping his judgments and doing them:" and we must learn to do all this.

But observe where it comes in: in the end, and not in the beginning. It is not, Thou shalt do this first, and then, in consideration of thy well-doing, I will pardon thy past failures, and have mercy on thee, no: but it stands in the very outset, "From all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you," and then afterwards, as the result of God's mercy and grace, "Ye shall walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments and do them." God begins with showing mercy, with pardoning and sanctifying, and then, as the *following effect*, not as the *preceding cause*, man walks in newness of life.[1] The lesson from this is, that you are not to stand at a distance till you have grown better, but to come immediately to your Saviour, that he may make you better: to come to him with all your guilt and sin about you, that he may take them away. The justification of the gospel is a justification "for the ungodly," for those who have been hitherto such, though they will not continue such hereafter. And on no other plan can we ever succeed: on no other, can the sinner find either peace or victory.

[1] So our Church Confession, 'Have mercy—spare—restore—and grant that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life.' This is quite the system of our Church, and of the Scriptures. Mercy first, and obedience, springing from grace, afterwards. See Article xi.—xiii.

To sum up, then, in a few words, the instructions which have been given to those whose case has been such as have been supposed. In the first place, be willing to become deeply sensible of your ruin by sin; and of the urgent and indispensable necessity of deliverance. You have not yet really been sensible of this, whatever you may imagine, or you could not rest where you are. Learn that you have not only sinned, but that you are "by nature the children of wrath," and have been in your life "enemies to God, by wicked works," and by aversion to his service. And feel that you must be delivered both from guilt and depravity, or you must perish everlastingly. Feel that you must no longer postpone a decided change. While you are lingering and acting undecidedly, life is wearing away, and sudden destruction may come upon you. "What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise and call upon thy God," that thou perish not. Secondly, settle it with yourselves, that it is utterly impossible for you, in any degree, either to make amends for your sins, or of your own power to attain to true holiness. And lastly, be equally convinced of the readiness of your Saviour, to pardon and save you: and make immediate and persevering application to him, to fulfil all his gracious promises to you: and rest assured that in so doing you shall be, or even are,

accepted to his mercy, and shall be enabled to serve him in holiness and righteousness of life.

Pursuing this course, whatever have been your particular state and character, there shall no more be reason to demand with reference to you, "Is there no balm in Gilead?" No more to complain respecting you, "Why is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" "The blood of Jesus Christ shall cleanse you from all sin," his Spirit shall recover you from the power of depravity.

But there is room, as I intimated, yet further to apply the text, though in a qualified sense; even in the case of sincere Christians, persons who have indeed felt their disease of sin, and earnestly inquired, "What must we do to be saved?" who have obeyed the gospel direction—have "believed in the Lord Jesus Christ," have "come to him" yea, and have "found rest to their souls," and with that rest, also power and strength to have victory over sin, and to serve God: even such persons are too capable of, in a measure, "returning again unto folly." They become perhaps, in a degree, remiss, negligent, unwatchful: they contract guilt, some evil temper or habit gains power over them; worldliness of mind creeps upon them. And too nearly in this state, they are apt to suffer

themselves to continue. They do not altogether depart from God: they do not omit prayer: they do not give up watching and striving against sin. I am not now speaking of a case which impeaches sincerity; but yet of one that is sinful and dangerous. The duties which have been enumerated are performed too scantily, too feebly, too coldly. There is a want of holy vigour, and zeal, and strictness, and fruitfulness, as well as of comfort. The Christian feels his decay: he makes some efforts against it: but he does not recover his lost ground, as he should do. The fault is, he is not living so simply and earnestly as he ought to do, "the life which he lives in the flesh, by the faith of the Son of God." Hence he does not, he cannot "stir up himself," as his case requires, to watching and prayer.

Here then again, peace and victory are greatly wanting, and there is still room for the application of the text. Why is it, O Christian, that thou art in this state? that thou art thus "lean from day to day?" "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?" Why then is not thy "spiritual health recovered?" Hast thou forgotten the means by which thou didst first find pardon and peace, grace and strength. Is thy Redeemer's "arm shortened, that it cannot save? Is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear?" "Thus

saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the *old* paths, where is the good way? and walk therein. Set thee up way marks, set thine heart towards the high way, even the way which thou wentest *turn again*." Betake thyself to God in Christ, as at the first; cast thyself on his mercy; implore pardon and strength. All the promises of God, and the way of faith in Christ, were provided for thy use, not only at the outset of a religious life, but even to the end. It is because thou hast ceased to make use of them so simply and so earnestly as perhaps thou once didst, that thou findest not the same mighty efficacy in them. Thou hast not given "the *same* diligence unto the full assurance of hope unto the end." There is but one way for thee from the first to the last. Blessed be God thou hast learnt to walk in it: proceed in it with a more undivided mind, more confidently, more vigorously, and thou shalt yet find it the path to peace, and victory, and salvation.

SERMON VIII.

2 CORINTHIANS II. 11.

LEST SATAN SHOULD GET AN ADVANTAGE OF US: FOR WE ARE NOT IGNORANT OF HIS DEVICES.

THE Scripture doctrine of the power and operations of evil spirits, however it may be to the infidel an object of derision, and to the mere nominal Christian of practical disregard, will ever awaken in the mind of the sincere believer, a serious attention, a solemn humble awe. When we consider the place which it holds—even if it were merely the *space* occupied by it—in divine revelation, we may be convinced that, occasionally to devote a discourse to the subject must be proper.

I. Let me then, in the first place, lead you to review with me the principal passages in Scripture, which set before us the operations of Satan and his angels; for we are not so much to conceive of one evil spirit as of many—a host, "a kingdom of darkness," ranged under their leader, and co-operating in the same design.

Scarcely then do we open the Old Testament, when the subject is brought before us in a very awful and affecting manner, in a case in which we are all concerned—the temptation and fall of our first parents. It is true, that here indeed the devil is not expressly mentioned; but no one doubts that the serpent was only used as an instrument by him, who on that account is elsewhere described as "the old serpent, called the devil and Satan." Here then we see this evil spirit from the first exerting his malice and artifice against the human race; drawing them into sin and ruin; and thus defacing that fair creation of God which he had just pronounced very good.

The book of Job, though placed further on in the canon, is understood to be another of the earliest books of Scripture: and it again affords a remarkable display of the malice and power of Satan, directed against an individual servant of God. Here this wicked spirit appears in his character of the accuser of the brethren. He presents himself among "the sons of God," the assembly of the righteous; speaks of himself as returning from "going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it:" no doubt seeking occasions of mischief. He insinuates the charge, so commonly brought against pious characters, by persons who perhaps little suspect under whose

influence they act—that Job's religion was but hypocrisy. He seeks and obtains permission to try Job, which he uses to the utmost with unrelenting malignity.

In the history of the kings of Israel we meet with some remarkable hints connected with our subject. David, it is known, once numbered his people from motives and for purposes which rendered his conduct highly displeasing to God, and brought severe judgments upon his kingdom. On this occasion it is said, "Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked,—or incited,—David to number Israel." The same evil spirit volunteered his services to go forth and "be a lying spirit" in the mouth of all Ahab's idolatrous prophets, to deceive Ahab, that he might go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead.

Once more, after the return of the Jews from their captivity at Babylon, when Joshua their pious high priest, and Zerubbabel their pious governor, were exerting themselves, under discouraging circumstances, to restore the state and religion of the Jews, the prophet Zechariah had a remarkable vision presented to him, in which he saw "Joshua, the high priest, standing before the angel of the Lord," to minister in his office, "and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him"—and prevent the effect of his ministrations: on which occasion,

" the Lord said unto Satan, the Lord rebuke thee, O Satan: even the Lord which hath chosen Jerusalem, rebuke thee. Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?"

On opening the New Testament, we have numerous instances brought before us of persons labouring under *possessions* of the devil, on whose behalf application was made to our blessed Lord. Satan who is represented in Scripture as at all times exercising a very alarming *spiritual* power over the souls of men, seems to have been permitted at that time to display a dreadful *physical* power against them, affecting both their understandings and their bodily frame. It has been remarked that this was permitted, in order both that men might more deeply feel their need of a deliverer, and that the power of Christ to deliver them might be more signally displayed. These possessions were productive of dumbness, blindness, deafness, derangement, and sometimes furious madness: shewing that there is no species of evil, mental or bodily, which wicked spirits are not able and ready to bring upon us if they were permitted. On these occasions, especially, we frequently read of devils in the plural number, and in one case, of a man whose " name was called *Legion*, because *many* devils had entered into him."

But such exercises of Satan's power being now,

in general at least, mercifully restrained, it may rather concern us to turn to passages which warn us against operations of a more subtle and still more dangerous kind.

And here, as at the very opening of the Old Testament, we were presented with too successful an attempt of this malignant spirit upon the first parents of our race, to seduce and thus to ruin them; so the very opening of the New Testament presents us with a like attempt—alike in design, though happily for us, the very reverse in its issue—made upon the great Redeemer of our race. We read, "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil. And he was there in the wilderness forty days tempted of Satan." He was led out to this conflict under the influence of the Holy Spirit, that, as one essential part of our Redemption, he might meet and vanquish our great spiritual enemy—the vanquisher of our race—might triumph over him: and might teach us "as he had overcome, to overcome also," after his example, and by strength derived from him.

Omitting various passages in the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, relative to the agency of the devil and his angels, we will confine ourselves to the consideration of a few select quotations on the subject, from the Epistles.

How awful a passage is that 2 Cor. iv. "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, should shine unto them." Our Lord had called Satan "the prince of this world:" and the Apostle here styles him "the God of this world." What dreadful power do such passages shew him to have obtained among the fallen children of men! And then observe what is the effect of his operation here described: to blind men's minds to the nature and glory of the gospel—"lest they should believe and be saved." O ye that "believe not" nor obey the truth, be warned! see to whose influence you are submitting.

Again, Ephes. ii. "You (saith the Apostle to his Christian brethren) hath God quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience;" i. e. in all those who live in disobedience to God's commandments, and neglect the salvation of Christ: over how great a proportion of mankind then must we fear that his influence still prevails. O ye that have hitherto been "children of disobedience!" would

to God that ye might now take warning, "recover yourselves from the snare of the devil who are taken captive by him at his will!" and become "obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance."

Yet again, in the same Epistle, (c. vi.) the Apostle thus exhorts his Christian brethren. "Finally, brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might: for we wrestle not against flesh and blood (only) but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness (or wicked spirits) in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand in the evil day, and having done all to stand."

Let who may scoff at the influence of evil spirits; with such representations before him as these, no one who has any pretensions to be a Christian believer can do it. It is no idle profession that we make at our baptism, to renounce the devil and all his works: for "we wrestle not" (saith the Apostle) our conflict is not "with flesh and blood:" it is with "principalities and powers—the rulers of the darkness of this world."

Hear further the exhortation of St. Peter: "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist stedfast in

the faith." In another place Satan is spoken of as "transformed into an angel of light" to deceive: here he is likened to "a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." Now I remark, that in either case—either that of such a subtle deceiver, or that of such a furious raging enemy—nothing could so effectually betray us to him, as a disbelief of his existence. Let us beware then of scepticism and unbelief upon this very serious subject.

Once more—in the book of Rev. (c. xii.) we read these words, "The great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world." What an expression is this! Alas! may we not see that the whole world hath been deceived? Have not all idolaters, to say no more, been infatuated, beyond what we might have supposed possible?—and they for ages constituted almost the whole world. Yet again, who is free from the delusion of preferring time to eternity? who is not deceived as to the value of worldly things compared with that of the world to come? who is not deceived in naturally viewing religion as adverse to happiness—and sin as a source of advantage? All are deceived, fatally deceived, except the true Christian—and even he may say, "We ourselves were sometime foolish, disobedient, *deceived*,—serving divers lusts and pleasures:" and here we see who deceiveth them!

"The devil deceiveth the whole world!" so the voice of revelation pronounceth. Shall we not dread his influence? shall we not seek to be delivered from his delusions?

II. I have brought all these passages of God's inspired word together in the first place, in the hope of making, by the divine blessing, a serious impression upon your minds of the solemnity and importance of the subject. Having done this, I would now endeavour, secondly, to trace a little more particularly the nature and manner of Satan's influence upon the mind—in order that, as my text says, we may not be "ignorant of his devices," but may be prepared against them. Still we take the Holy Scriptures for our only guide, and observe,

1. That Satan often attempts to *push men to extremes.* The occasion to which the text relates will explain this. It was the case of the incestuous professor of Christianity at Corinth. This man, as well as the Church in that place at large, had at first made light of his crime: he had assumed a bold front upon it, and been continued in the communion of the church as if little or nothing had been amiss. But when roused by St. Paul's spirited expostulations, and cutting reproofs, the church had been excited to do its duty, and to "put away from among them that wicked

person:" then the man himself was awakened and alarmed, and by God's grace brought to true repentance: yea, so altered were his views of things that he was in danger of being "swallowed up of over much sorrow." Here then was "the device of Satan" against which the wise and holy Apostle would guard. That same subtle deceiver who had before hardened the sinner in presumption,—now, when this was no longer practicable, would exert his powers to drive him to despair. Now, therefore, the Apostle exhorts the church to "forgive" the repenting sinner, and "comfort him," lest, says he, "Satan should get an advantage against us:—for we are not ignorant of his devices."

There is a similar circumstance to be observed in the temptation of our Lord. The first of the three temptations recorded was to distrust God—and in consequence deviate from the path of duty for relief. That temptation being repelled, the next was to presumption. "Cast thyself down, for it is written, he shall give his angels charge concerning thee, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone."

This then is one of Satan's "devices," which he is continually practising—to push men into extremes. It appears from these instances that he is able to watch our circumstances and adapt his temptations accordingly. Is the sinner young

and healthy, disposed to carelessness and enjoyment? Then, "It is time enough yet: God is merciful: you will live to repent:" these are his too prevailing suggestions. But are circumstances changed? have serious thoughts taken possession of the mind, and does death appear to be approaching? Then he suggests, "It is now too late: you have sinned away the day of grace: the door is shut." Thus would he keep him back from repentance, and faith, and salvation. Again, can he no longer prevail with us to neglect our eternal concerns—then will he perhaps endeavour to urge them upon our minds with such oppressive weight, and to present them in such a gloomy light—so veiling God's mercies and promises from our view, that we shall be unable to look up with any cheerfulness—or to walk with any liberty in the good ways of God. If on our guard against self-righteous confidence, he will push us to antinomian carelessness of conduct: or while we guard against this, to a spirit of bondage and legality. If insensible of our weakness, he will tempt us to self-confidence: if dependant upon God's grace, to remissness. Our only security is in constantly seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who can give us a "right judgment in all things."

2. Another device of Satan and one which tempts us to be sceptical concerning his influ-

ences, is, that like those of the Holy Spirit of God, they are not immediately *distinguishable from the operations of our own minds.* But Scripture would lead us to expect this, as will appear, while by several instances, we shew how Satan works upon us through the medium of our own propensities and passions. Listen then, Brethren, to the following examples:—

When Judas, prompted by resentment, covetousness, and various bad passions, went forth to make the bargain for betraying his Lord, it is written—"the Devil having now put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him." And again—"Satan entered into him."

Again: when Ananias and Sapphira, prompted by covetousness on the one hand, and the desire of reputation on the other, had devised that falsehood which cost them both their lives, and we fear their souls too, St. Peter, speaking by the inspiration of the Spirit of God, says to Ananias, "Ananias, why hath *Satan filled thine heart* to lie unto the Holy Ghost?" This shews both that Satan works upon us through the medium of our own passions, and likewise that we are accountable for suffering him to do it. "Ananias, why hath Satan done this?"—why hast thou allowed him,—given him the opportunity,—yielded to him?

Yet again: cautioning the Ephesians against

anger, St. Paul says, "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath: *neither give place to the devil.*" It appears, therefore, that when we indulge anger, malice, revenge, envy, we "give place to the devil," and the devil prevails against us.

And hence again in the New Testament he is called by our Lord the Father (or author) of lies and of murder.

This then is a great device of Satan—to work upon and stimulate our bad passions. Now all this furnishes most important lessons. Whenever we give way to any of our evil passions, we then yield to the assaults of Satan—we "give place to the devil,"—we comply with his will—we lay ourselves open to his inroads. Oh, how should this consideration make us pause, and watch, and pray, whenever we find any of these evils rising.

The same considerations shew that Satan's temptations furnish no excuse for our sins. If he works upon us, it is, generally speaking, only through the evil passions of our hearts—and no further than we yield to him.

3. A third and leading object of Satan in order to the destruction of our souls is, to *hide from us the nature and glory of the gospel of Christ*, that we may neither understand it, love it, or obey it. "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the eyes of them that believe not, lest

the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

There is a sentence connected with this subject in the parable of the sower, which may well deserve our attention. "When any one," saith our Lord, "heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not," through carelessness or prejudice, "Satan cometh immediately and taketh away the word which was sown in their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved."—How striking and affecting a view of "his devices" does this present to us. He knows, however we may disregard it, that our seriously receiving and believing the word of the gospel is the most likely means, indeed is the only means, to frustrate his designs against us, and secure our salvation. However careless therefore we may be about treasuring up, and profiting by what we hear, it appears that he will not be negligent to prevent our doing so. He will "immediately," if possible, divert our thoughts from it to some other subject; or if that be not altogether practicable, will engage us to procrastinate, and defer our compliance with it. "Immediately Satan cometh and catcheth away the word which was sown in their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved." O, brethren, seriously consider this warning of your Saviour. Will you be less careful to watch for your own salvation

than Satan is for your destruction? But let me ask, do you not directly subserve this design of his, if you come to hear the word of God without serious thoughts and prayer beforehand? If after you have heard it, instead of retiring for meditation and prayer, you presently fall into conversation on other subjects? If either before or after divine service, you be found, perhaps in the very precincts of the church, discussing the news of the day, and indifferent topics?

With this part of our subject we may likewise connect an observation on a particular portion of the temptation of our first parent. You all know the stress which the scriptures lay upon faith. "He that believeth not shall be damned." And with good reason do they lay great stress upon it: for in what other manner, I ask, is it possible for any truth of divine revelation to profit us, than by our believing it? Hence then it is a great device of Satan to obstruct our faith,—to lead us to unbelief. And now mark how clearly this appeared in the first temptation. God had said, "In the day ye eat thereof ye shall surely die." Satan on the contrary declares, "Ye shall not surely die: ye shall become as gods." His device prevailed, and the disbelief of the divine threatening opened the way to the first sin, from which all others have sprung! And so it is still. Did the sinner really

believe that "the wicked should be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God:" that "these shall go away into everlasting punishment." Did he realize this as applied to himself, could he possibly go on in his sins? But Satan still suggests, and he has many agents to assist his suggestions, "Ye shall not surely die"—God will never inflict that everlasting punishment which he hath threatened—or you shall live to repent—or in some way you shall escape. Oh beware to whom you are listening, when you admit such presumptions. Satan is getting a fatal "advantage against you." Be not "ignorant of his devices!"

4. Where, however, Satan cannot prevail to the destruction of men's souls, it is "his device" *to harass, distress, and hinder them in the service of God.*

It is impossible to enumerate even any considerable proportion of the ways in which this may be done; but we may mention such as these: leading the mind to partial and distorted views of truth and duty; to impose upon itself burdens grievous to be borne, which God hath not imposed; to dwell upon deep and mysterious subjects which confound instead of cheering and edifying the mind; aggravating at times its views of its own sins so as to tempt it to despair; and finally suggesting hard thoughts of God and his dispensations, instead of

allowing us to contemplate him as a merciful and gracious Father, abundant in goodness and truth. It is the observation of that illustrious reformer and profound divine, Martin Luther,—' Satan our spiritual adversary, is a gloomy and morose spirit, who will never suffer us, if he can prevent it, to serve God with a cheerful and peaceable mind.'

III. Having thus endeavoured to bring before you what the Holy Scriptures have delivered on the subject of Satan's devices against us, I would in the third and last place offer you some directions and encouragements to assist you in guarding against them.

And 1st. As my text implies, we should " not be ignorant " of them. We must seriously believe and diligently study what the scriptures teach concerning them: for, as I have before observed, we cannot give Satan a greater " advantage against us," than by discrediting or disregarding his agency.

2dly. We must stand prepared to " resist " all his assaults, " steadfast in the faith." And our blessed Lord has admirably taught us the use to be made of the express words of scripture, for this purpose. He met every temptation of Satan by the testimony of Scripture, opposed to whatever Satan could suggest. In this way we are to em-

ploy " the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God," and " the shield of faith whereby we may quench all the fiery darts of the wicked " one, If, like our first parent Eve, we enter into parley with temptation, it will in general be a lost case: we are then but one step from falling.

3dly. We are with respect to this subject especially, " to pray always with all prayer and supplication." God only can effectually preserve us. If we would be kept from the malice and subtlety of the powers of darkness, we must seek to be at all times under the guidance and protection of the good Spirit of God. We must implore his constant presence, and cherish his gracious influences. We must guard against whatever would, according to the language of scripture, " grieve the Holy Spirit" of God, and " quench" his good influences upon our minds.

And to those who desire thus practically to " renounce the devil and all his works," and yield themselves to the service of God, there is the most abundant encouragement held out. They need fear neither the malice, nor the power, nor the subtlety of the enemies of their salvation. It is written, " Resist the devil and he will flee from you." It is promised, " God shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." " For this cause was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy

the works of the devil:" and "because he hath overcome," all that follow him shall "overcome also." The most tender and encouraging declarations are made concerning his sympathy with his tempted and conflicting people. "We have not a High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are—yet without sin." And "for that he hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." The Apostle is therefore bold to say to all Christian believers, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man. But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also, make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." Wherefore "strengthen the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees: say to them that are of fearful heart, be strong, fear not."

I fear many who think little and believe little concerning Satan's devices, are continually ensnared by them—and in danger of being *fatally* ensnared: tempted continually to pride, anger, envy, perhaps to sensual lusts—at least to love of the world—neglect of religion—of Christ—of their souls: and constantly falling before these temptations: so as by no means to lead a "sober,

righteous, and godly life." However little you think of it, Satan has you in his snare—"taken captive by him at his will." You are his servants: for all are such who are not positively the servants of God; and if you die in this state you will have your portion with the devil and his angels in the "lake that burneth with fire and with brimstone." O be awakened to the serious consideration of your state—and of the life you are living. "Flee from the wrath to come!" Come out from among the ungodly and be separate. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ in a manner you have never hitherto done. Be serious. Realize your sins and your dangers. Be convinced of the necessity of fighting the good fight of faith, if you would ever hope to lay hold on eternal life.

SERMON IX.

2 CORINTHIANS v. 11.

KNOWING THEREFORE THE TERROR OF THE LORD, WE PERSUADE MEN.

THE Bible, it has been well observed, is calculated *for impression*, beyond all other books in the world.[1] There is no book so suited to arrest the attention, to convince the judgment, to seize the imagination, to affect the heart, to alarm the fears, to excite the hopes, to console the sorrows, and to stimulate the exertions of mankind. It powerfully addresses itself to all the faculties and feelings of our minds, and leaves no method untried by which it may promote our salvation. At the same time, the air and spirit of truth so pervade every part of it, that there is no man who is not made *to feel* that he is acting wrong and unwisely, when he disregards its admonitions, or transgresses its commands. It ever approves

[1] Bishop Porteus.

itself to "the conscience," however the heart may fight against it.

In some of its sentences we discover at once an incomparable force and energy. A single word often calls up in our minds a world of reflections,—all suited, I will not say to please, but to do us good.

Of this kind is the expression of our text: "the terror of the Lord." It is impossible to set before you all the solemn and awakening thoughts which this term may suggest. "The wrath of a king," saith Solomon, "is as the messengers of death." And if this be true of an earthly king, what must be "the terror of *the Lord?*" "Who knoweth the power of his wrath?"

I shall endeavour to bring before you some of those exhibitions of "the terror of the Lord," which may best assist your conceptions of it: and then point out the practical use to be made of the consideration, as the Apostle speaks—"persuading men."

I. We speak of "THE TERROR OF THE LORD."

There are various views which may be taken of it, and various subjects to which the expression may be applied. We may justly say, indeed, that we are surrounded by "the terrors," as well as by "the mercies of the Lord." Wherever we turn

our eyes, whether inward into our own breasts, or outward upon the world; whether we look into the histories of past ages, or contemplate the events of present times,—monuments of "the terror of the Lord" present themselves.

It is not only in such tremendous instances as the old world desolated of its inhabitants by the flood, and Sodom and Gomorrah "suffering the vengeance of eternal fire;" not only in thousands and ten thousands perishing at once by pestilence, or famine, or earthquake, that "the terror of the Lord" is seen: nor only in a Babylon, a Tyre, or a Jerusalem "swept with the besom of destruction," in pursuance of a known decree of heaven: but if it be true, that there never is "evil (or affliction) in a city, and the Lord hath not done it," then do all the wars, all the calamities, all the miseries, that mankind have ever experienced, exhibit to us "the terror of the Lord."

Truly may we say unto God, "Thou, even thou, art to be feared: and who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry!" "My flesh trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments!" for the earth hath been always full of wars, calamities, and miseries. History, like the roll of Ezekiel, is "written within and without, with *lamentations*, and *mourning*, and *woe*."

But leaving these more public, and as it may be thought more extraordinary scenes, the ordinary course of things does really, and for that very reason that it is the *ordinary* course, set forth to the reflecting mind, if possible, in a still stronger light, "the terror of the Lord."

Every hospital, every sick room, every death-bed displays it. What hath become of all the countless millions who have inhabited this globe of earth before us? They are gone, and "their place knoweth them no more!" "Their memory is perished with them!"

Man, so "curiously wrought," so "fearfully and wonderfully made," both in his body and his soul,—after continuing here a few days without seeming to answer any end worthy of his creation; —"man dieth, and wasteth away, he giveth up the ghost, and where is he?" "As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up, so man lieth down and riseth not again, till the heavens be no more." Upwards of three thousand of us, it is computed, are swept from the earth every hour that passes!—"O say unto God, how terrible art thou in thy works!" "Thou turnest man to destruction:" thou sayest, "Return, ye children of men:" and, in consequence, "they are carried away as with a flood."

The moral darkness in which God hath suffered

the world to be involved, as the consequence and the punishment of the sins of men, affords another awful exhibition of the terror of his indignation. What a dreary prospect does the world present, immersed, as almost the whole of it was for thousands of years, and as the far greater part of it still is, in ignorance of God and of eternal life, of the duty of man and the way of everlasting peace. To see rational beings created "after the image of God," formed to know him, and serve him, and enjoy his blessing,—to see them worshipping graven images, "falling down to the stock of a tree," praying unto it and saying, "Deliver me, for thou art my God:" and, when they framed the idea of deities a little more exalted than these, to find them pourtraying their characters, such as would disgrace the human kind, and worshipping them with rites, the most contemptible, the most cruel, and the most impure,—is a sight deeply affecting, which constrains us to exclaim with the Prophet, "They feed upon ashes: a deceived heart hath turned them aside, that they cannot deliver their soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in our right hand?"

But this, we are further informed is to be considered as a punishment, as well as an indication of their wickedness. "He hath shut their eyes that they cannot see, and their heart that they

cannot understand." "Because they liked not to retain God in their knowledge," he "sent them a strong delusion that they should believe a lie." And to similar reasons we are to ascribe it in great measure, that the divine religion of the gospel, which is a sovereign remedy for all the ills of human nature, has never yet visited so large a part of the habitable globe.

But we need not extend our views so widely. Let us look at the characters of individual men, and into our own breasts: there we shall find awful marks of divine displeasure: such as may well cause us alarm. We read in Scripture of "God's Spirit being taken from men," and their being given up to obduracy and hardness of heart. The consequence is, that they then "go from one wickedness to another, and never come into God's righteousness." Some such instances are set before us in holy Writ. King Saul was one: and Judas Iscariot was another. And though we ought not without the most cautious fear to surmise any such thing, and with no degree of positiveness to form such a judgment of any living characters, yet surely we do see men, once perhaps hopeful, whose case may be observed by us with awe and dread.

And if we look into ourselves, do we not in our own souls find such marks of disorder and depra-

vation, and of the displeasure of God as are very dreadful? I am fully persuaded, that such marks do indeed exist in every one of us; though inconsideration may induce us to overlook them, and pride and prejudice may render us blind to them.

Proceed we to another view of the subject. What are the feelings, the fears, and forebodings of our minds concerning the termination of our present state of existence?—concerning death and our entrance into another world?

I know indeed that many, even many very wicked men are little disturbed, and still more *pretend* to be little disturbed, upon the subject of *death*. But then they are either destitute of consideration, or they are buoyed up with false hopes. Yet when the conscience is in any degree awakened, what apprehensions of death and the eternal world will frequently break in upon and disturb the repose!

Let me appeal to yourselves. Have you never felt a pang excited in your breast, such as words could ill describe, by the realizing thought of dying, and appearing before the bar of God? If you have not, it is because the thought has never come home to your hearts. Death and the unseen world have been to you such distant objects, that you have never obtained a distinct view of them.

To meet death in the hurry of a battle, or to meet it with as little serious thought in any other way, is what the human mind is very capable of. But to meet it, looking all its horrors in the face,—debility, languor, pain, weeping friends, the fatal irresistible stroke approaching, which, once felt, we are no more here—but gone into a scene of things new, unknown, eternal: to lie deliberately contemplating and expecting all this, is more than man, unsupported by the faith of the gospel, and uncheered by the consolations of the Holy Ghost, has, I will not say magnanimity, but hardihood enough to bear.

But, my brethren, for what end am I bringing these awful subjects before your view? Not to torment you before the time. God forbid! These things must be met, whether we will previously think of them or not. To think of them, will neither hasten their approach nor increase their horrors. It may turn this prospect of terror into a scene of peace, of hope, of exulting joy. For this end alone we bring before you "the terror of the Lord."

These views are intimately connected with that which the apostle has immediately in his eye. His thoughts are fixed upon the day of judgment, with its awful events and eternal decisions. "We must all, (he says) appear before the judgment seat of

Christ, that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." "*Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.*"

And surely the representations which the Scriptures make of this great consummation of all things, are such as ought to awaken the most obdurate heart, and excite it "to flee from the wrath to come." "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire," descending in the clouds, with ten thousands of "his holy ones:" the trumpet shall sound, and "all that are in the graves shall hear its voice and shall come forth, they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation." "All the dead, both small and great, shall stand before God:" "*We* must all appear," must all be made manifest in our true characters: I who speak, and you who hear me: there we shall meet again—though long before that time our bodies will have been, each in its turn, consigned to the grave, and returned, 'earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust:' yet there shall we meet again: not as now, to hear the word of reconciliation from the lips of a weak fellow mortal; but to have the secrets of our hearts, and the actions of our lives all brought to light; and to receive from the mouth of God

the Judge of all, the final sentence of everlasting salvation or damnation, "according to that we have done,"—according to that we are now doing in the body, "whether it be good or bad." Oh think, my brethren, what will be the terror of that scene! when, "rising from the bed of death" we behold the heavens and the earth dissolving around us, —the judgment set,—the dead raised,—the books opened: while we stand in awful suspense, or rather, in more awful anticipation of the final word—"Depart, accursed, into everlasting fire," or, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you." Oh what will the terror of the Lord then appear; what heart can conceive it?

'With what terror' (writes the holy Bishop Hall, on beholding the arraignment of a felon,) 'With what terror doth this malefactor stand at the bar! his hand trembles, while it is lift up for his trial; his lips quake while he saith, 'Not guilty;' his countenance condemns him, before the judge; and his fear is ready to despatch him, before the executioner. Yet this judge is but a weak man, that must soon after die himself: the sentence that he can pronounce is already passed, unavoidably passed, upon the most innocent: that death which the law inflicteth, is but momentary: who knoweth whether himself shall not die more painfully? O

God! with what horror then shall the guilty soul stand before *thy* dread tribunal, in the day of the great assize of the world! whilst there is the presence of an infinite majesty to daunt him; of a fierce and clamorous conscience to accuse him; legions of terrible fiends waiting to seize upon him; a gulf of unquenchable fire ready to receive him; while the glory of the Judge is no less confounding than the cruelty of the tormentors; where the sentence is unavoidable and the execution is everlasting! Why do not *these terrors of Thee*, my God, make me wise now to hold a trial upon my soul and my actions, that, being acquitted by my own heart, I may not be condemned by thee! and, being judged by myself, I may not be condemned with the world!'

O my friends, would to God that ye did but consider these things! that ye did but *believe* them! But can you, while living as many among you, I doubt not, are conscious of living, can you pretend that you really believe that *you* shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ? Oh how will you bear to appear there, to be there "made manifest" (for so the original word is) and exhibited in your true characters before God and angels and the assembled world, while you receive eternal judgment according as your works have been? Think, you who are living careless and

impenitent, and thoughtless about religion, how will ye escape if ye "neglect the great salvation of the gospel," which is proposed to you? and how will you bear to be driven for ever, accursed, from the presence of God: separated from many who have lived with you, who have worshipped with you, who are perhaps now worshipping with you: who have instructed you, perhaps, and prayed for you, and mourned that you would not be "persuaded. Think how you will bear to see your pious parents, and relatives, and friends, (it is our Lord himself who suggests the dreadful idea) "sitting down in the kingdom of God—and you yourselves cast out—into outer darkness, where is weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth."

You may disbelieve these things, and treat them as idle tales, as vain alarms: but "though you believe not, yet God," who hath revealed them in his word, "abideth faithful, he cannot deny himself."

There is but one more view which we will take of "the terror of the Lord." The conceptions which the reflecting mind will form of this subject, must be heightened not less by the means adopted for the pardoning of sin, than by the punishment provided for it if unpardoned. Look unto the garden of Gethsemane. Behold there Him of whom

it is attested, that he is "the brightness of the Father's glory," and that he "upholdeth all things by the word of his power;" behold him, when standing in our place, and "bearing our sins," "sore amazed and very heavy;" his "soul" filled with horror, and exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: see him in the "cold" night, and when prostrate on the earth, "his sweat like great drops of blood falling to the ground:" hear him, again, cry from the cross, with an exceeding great and bitter cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Behold, I say, the sorrows of the Son of God when he achieved our redemption—and know "the terror of the Lord,"—his awful justice—his infinite abhorrence of sin—his determination not to let it pass unatoned for, even where he may pardon it. Think, if the Son of God did all but sink under the punishment of sin thus pressing upon him for a few hours—how wilt thou, how will the impenitent sinner—endure it for ever!

"Knowing," or since we know, saith the Apostle, "the terror of the Lord." He knew the certainty, he was impressed with the solemnity of it. Hence having himself fled, and escaped from the threatened evil, he exhorts others to do the same.

"Knowing the terror of the Lord, *we persuade*

man." We would imitate his example while we speak,

II. Of the USE TO BE MADE of the solemn considerations which have now been brought before us.

It is not *for the mere purpose* of alarming and terrifying: it is not to make men melancholy and wretched; that we call up these images of terror before your minds. God forbid! He ill deserves the name of a man, who would needlessly cause pain to the meanest creature: much more to a rational spirit. And he, I am sure, has never himself "known the terror of the Lord," or felt the anguish which the thought of "the wrath of God abiding on" the soul must produce, who would willingly inflict that pain on his brother man. But we "know," from the sure word of God, that this evil hangs over all the impenitent: we know that you must either fear it now, or feel it forever hereafter: we know (we trust) the salutary effect of being awakened to discover and escape the danger. Call us, therefore, uncharitable, call us enthusiastic,—we "cannot but speak forth those things" which we believe and know. Whether would you prefer the charity of him, who, seeing your house in flames, should from tender fear of disturbing and affrighting you, suffer you to be burnt in your beds, or his who should spare

no pains to awaken and give you the alarm? As believers of God's word, we see "a sword coming upon you," while you live careless in your sins; and as ministers of that word, we dare not but give you warning, lest you "die in your iniquity," and "your blood be required at our hands."

Were there "no hope" for you, we would be the last to disturb your repose, short-lived and little worth as it must be. But there is hope, there is certainty of your salvation, if only you be induced to seek it as you should do. But we see you in danger of letting the opportunity slip, through insensibility to your situation, through sloth, through negligence, through false security, through love of the world, and through the pleasures and "the deceitfulness of sin." After the scripture pattern, therefore, we rouse your minds "by the terror of the Lord," as well as "beseech you by the mercies of God."

But especially, after the Apostle's example, we would labour to "persuade men." Persuasion is the end to which we would apply the consideration of "the terror of the Lord." The kind and friendly, but urgent language of persuasion, is that to which we would ever have recourse.

1. By all the solemn topics, then, which have been brought under your notice, let me persuade

you—in the first place—to *seriousness of mind*—and against carelessness, inconsideration, and the neglect of religion. It is the complaint of the Lord by one of his prophets of old, "My people doth not consider." And still, what reason have we to make the same complaint! Though the word of God, though the providence of God, though every thing around us and within us calls upon us to be serious, to "consider," "to prepare to meet our God:" yet, alas! how few obey the call? Men are occupied with the present life; in youth,—gaiety, and pleasure; and in advancing years,—the business of the world; and in old age,—the love of ease swallows up their attention: so that nothing can be more true than that most men live as if they were never to die: live as if there were no strict, solemn account to be given hereafter: as if there were no day of judgment, no eternity, no heaven, or at least no hell; no God, whose perfections, whose word, or whose dispensations gave us reason to apprehend any thing solemn in our future intercourse with him. But know, my friends, from all which has now been brought before you, know that your state here is not one in which such levity, such neglect of God, is admissible, is tolerable. All things call upon you to be serious in seeking the salvation of your souls—serious in your conduct towards

the God with whom you have to do—serious in religion.

Is seriousness in religion unreasonable? On the contrary, he only acts reasonably, and in a manner which he *dares to reflect upon*, who is seriously religious. I repeat it: he only *dares* to look backward, and to look forward, and to reflect upon himself, who is serious in religion.

And is such seriousness gloomy and miserable? Abhorred be such a thought. It is blasphemy against God: it is disgraceful to the rational nature of man. What, I ask, is that happiness worth, which will not bear to be seriously reflected upon? What are all his pleasures worth, who dares not look into his own breast, and calmly contemplate his death-bed?

Such is our situation here—sinful creatures just tottering on the brink of eternity, that without true religion, man must be either destitute of peace, or void of reflection:—of reflection, I mean, on himself, his own conduct, his condition, and situation, and prospects.

But oh! to be able calmly to look within, calmly to look upwards, calmly to look forward, into an eternal state: though feeling ourselves miserable sinners, yet to be able to say "we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord:" to find in 'ourselves the working of the Spirit of

Christ mortifying the works of the flesh, and our earthly members, and drawing up our minds to high and heavenly things:' "making us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light," and thus affording us a pledge of our interest in that blessed state: this, this indeed is happiness, worthy of an immortal soul. This we invite you to partake of, when we urge you to be truly and devoutly religious.

What have you to compare with it? What that can supply its place, and stand you in stead without it? You "think of God and are troubled." You think of death and your hearts sink within you. There is no remedy for this in flying from God, and stifling reflection. The time of reflection must at length come, and it will last for ever. Reflection stifled during time, will rise again in eternity, in the form of hopeless and never-ending remorse. Cherish it then now, while it may be salutary. Be serious, be practical, be decided, be humble, be devout in religion.

2. By the terror of the Lord we persuade you *by no means to admit slight notions of the evil of sin.* To make light of sin is natural, but it is ruinous to man. The tendency of all false systems of religion is to cherish this propensity of our fallen nature. Here the self-righteous rejecter, and the antinomian abuser, of the doctrine of sal-

vation by grace, unite. And here too the Unitarian agrees with both. They are both blind to its intrinsic evil.

But all such sentiments concerning sin, as would make it appear a comparatively light and venial evil, meet with the most direct contradiction, as well from fact, and the state of the world, as from Scripture. What is it that hath caused all this havoc, confusion, and misery, which we behold in God's creation, once pronounced "very good?" It is sin. Who hath slain all the past generations of mankind? filled human life with trouble, vexed our bodies with disease, and racked our hearts with disappointment, and anguish, and sad forebodings? Sin hath done it all. In all you feel, therefore, and in all you fear, read the evil of sin. See its effects in all the instances we before enumerated, and in multitudes beside. In God "repenting that he had made man upon the earth," and destroying him from it with a flood. In Sodom and Gomorrah: in the Israelites dying in the wilderness: in the nations of Canaan, by divine command, extirpated for their crimes: in the rejection of the Jews, and their condition to this day. See it in the agonies of death and the pains of hell: and see it in the sufferings of the Redeemer. This last instance silences and confounds every surmise, that our sufferings may arise from

any defect of goodness in the Creator: and declares them to proceed only from the perfection of his holiness. It demonstrates that "God is love"—though he be also "a consuming fire."

What then must the evil of sin be? Let me entreat of you to pause upon these considerations. And then seriously inquire, whether the views which you have been used to take of sin, in any adequate measure accord with the displays which Almighty God hath made of his judgment concerning it. Examine further,—is your sense of your own sinfulness and guilt such as makes your heart respond to what God has declared upon the subject, and to the feelings which all holy men have expressed respecting it? Can you, from your own experience, form any idea of what is meant, when it is declared that "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked?" Do you not only use the words of Scripture (it is easy and common to do so,) but do you find them aptly expressive of the feelings of your heart:—"Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me!" "My iniquities are more in number than the hairs of my head, and my heart hath failed me!" "My sin is ever before me." "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." "Hide thy face from my sin, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean

heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me!" Or again the language of our Church, 'We have erred, and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep: we have done those things which we ought not to have done, and left undone those things which we ought to have done, and there is no health in us.' 'We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, which we from time to time most grievously have committed, by thought, word, and deed, provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against us!' Or, once more, that of our good Bishop Beveridge, 'When I preach, I sin; when I pray, I sin; when I administer the Lord's Supper, I sin: my very repentance needs to be repented of, and my tears of godly sorrow to be washed in the blood of Christ.' Thus have felt, and thus have spoken, all the best and holiest men in all ages, and under all dispensations. And I must crave leave to say that if your feelings concerning yourselves, concerning your own guilt and ill-desert before God, be materially different from theirs, it is a circumstance which should make you take the alarm. For "if we say that we have not sinned," or that our sins are few or small, "we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but he that confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."

3. In the third place, then, let me persuade you "by the terror of the Lord" not '*to presume to come before God trusting in your own righteousness;*' no, nor in vague and undefined notions of the mercy of God, but only in his mercy as 'declared' and exercised 'unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord;' "in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." But "no man cometh unto the Father," no sinner can find acceptance with him, but "by" the only-begotten Son, through his atonement and mediation. Out of Christ, (if I may so speak) and except through Christ, "God is a consuming fire" to sinners.

Vain therefore, and futile, yea, fatally delusive are all our conceptions of God as so mild and merciful that he will never execute vengeance. Such conceptions are founded in disregard to Scripture, and they are formed in defiance of fact. According to them no "terror of the Lord" exists, much less then can it be "known." But it does exist, it is "known," it is manifestly displayed, and in an awful manner gives the lie to such self-flattering notions of sinful men, "vainly puffed up by a fleshly mind to set up their own fancies concerning God, in opposition to the revelation which he hath vouchsafed of himself." "He that believeth not, maketh God a liar:" "he is condemned

already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God." He that presumes to come to God otherwise than by Christ, and his atonement and intercession, rejects the counsel and the salvation of God to his own destruction.

But though we dissuade you from daring to come in any other way; we persuade, we invite, we encourage you,—even though the chief of sinners, —yea in God's own language we "beseech" you to come; not to fail of coming, not to delay to come in this way. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them: and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

In this way, and through this Saviour, even the chief of sinners is invited to draw near into the presence of a holy God, with the hope, yea with the *confidence* of acceptance. Do you then feel the burden of your sins? Do you feel your guilt? Do you tremble for your danger? "Turn ye to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope!" "Repent and turn from all your transgressions." "Cast

away all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed, so iniquity shall not be your ruin." Betake yourselves to the Saviour of sinners. He will in no wise cast you out: he will receive you graciously: "he will abundantly pardon."

4. But even the most sincere Christians are not exempt from the application of our present subject, either in an individual or a collective capacity. "Knowing the terror of the Lord" in his awful dealings with many churches, which not valuing and improving aright the advantages afforded them, have been deprived of the light of life, and given up to heresy, delusion, and darkness: knowing the state to which the seven once flourishing churches of Asia have long been reduced, because they did not duly regard the admonitions of him who "walked in the midst of the golden candlesticks, and held the stars in his right hand," we might well "persuade" you, and every christian society, in the words of the Saviour, 'Be watchful: remember how ye have received and heard, and hold fast: repent, repair your decays, and strengthen every good thing that remains; lest I come unto you, and remove your candlestick out of its place.

Need any individual Christian, again, who "knows the terror of the Lord," in his dealings with Lot, and with Eli, with David, and many other his offending servants, who knows the bitter

consequences of "grieving God's holy Spirit, and wounding his own conscience," of being involved in doubts and uncertainty on a death-bed, be "persuaded" to walk watchfully, circumspectly; to guard against lukewarmness and declensions, to give diligence to "make his calling and election sure;" to strive in all things so to walk as "to please God?"

In one word, a single verse just preceding the text exhibits the sum and substance of all to which we would "persuade" *you*, brethren, and excite ourselves. "Wherefore we labour (saith the Apostle) that whether present or absent, whether in the body or separated from it by death, we may be accepted of him." To bring us so to live is the end of all the threatenings and all the promises, of all the warnings and all the encouragements of God's word, of all the mercies and all the judgments of his hand. May they all, with respect to you, be available to this their proper end! May they lead you all so to live that when Christ shall come, "the second time to judge the world," you may be "found of him in peace without spot and blameless!"

SERMON X.

LUKE v. 8.

WHEN SIMON PETER SAW IT, HE FELL DOWN AT JESUS' KNEES, SAYING, DEPART FROM ME, FOR I AM A SINFUL MAN, O LORD.

GREAT attention was at this time excited by the miracles and the preaching of our Lord, who had lately commenced his public ministry. "The people pressed upon him to hear the word of God. And he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, and saw two ships"—two small fishing vessels—"standing by the lake; but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people out of the ship. Now, when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at

thy word I will let down the net. And, when they had this done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes; and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord; for he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken."

Such is the connexion of the text, and such the occasion of the incident which it records. The impression made upon Peter's mind was powerful, and the sentiment which it called forth, remarkable. We will consider,

I. THE SOURCE OF SUCH FEELINGS AS ARE HERE DISPLAYED; and,

II. THE DIRECTION TO BE GIVEN TO THEM.

I. THE SOURCE OF SUCH FEELINGS AS THE TEXT DISPLAYS.

The mind of fallen man is full of inconsistencies and apparent contradictions upon religious subjects. Man is made for religion, and in a certain sense is disposed to religion, (as the constant tendency to superstition shews;) but to true religion—the spiritual worship of the only true God,—he is

utterly averse. Again, man habitually presumes upon the Divine mercy; yet he has hard thoughts of God, and is prone to tremble at the Divine justice. Still further: he is full of self-flattery, and the pride of virtue; yet he cannot but feel a deep sense of imperfection, a lurking consciousness of guilt. And the one or the other of these principles is called into action according to occasions and circumstances. While health is strong, while prosperity smiles, while the world applauds, a man shall feel nothing perhaps but self-complacency, and shall consider the happiness he enjoys as a proof of the approbation of heaven. But let his circumstances alter—let his health decline—let his prosperity forsake him—let the world reproach him: what a reverse shall take place in his feelings. He shall think, perhaps, that God fights against him: perhaps his sins shall now stare him in the face; and his presumption of the Divine favour, shall give way to forebodings of vengeance: and all this, when no important change has taken place in his character —the only change which could really affect his situation, with reference to the Divine favour or displeasure. Of this we have an instance in the case of the woman who had entertained the prophet Elijah; whose conduct was pleasing to God, and who had many proofs of the Divine

approbation; when her son fell sick and died, she turned to Elijah and said, "What have I to do with thee, thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sins to remembrance, and to slay my son?"

But we have several instances in Scripture,—not indeed of an entire change of men's views concerning themselves, but yet of very strong impressions of sinfulness and unworthiness made upon their minds;—not by any great reverses in providence, not by anything which could bespeak the displeasure of heaven, but by what might more reasonably be viewed in a contrary light, and considered as high honours, signal favours conferred upon them by God.

Such was the case of the text. Christ wrought a wonderful miracle in favour of Simon Peter and his companions. And what was the effect produced upon Peter's mind by the extraordinary fact? "When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, and said, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." We are surprised at the effect: yet, when we consider it, it is not at all unnatural. The case is not solitary: we have others resembling it. God manifested his glory in an extraordinary manner to Job—a man previously distinguished for piety and holiness: and what was the consequence? "Then Job answered the

Lord and said, Behold I am vile: what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer: yea, twice, but I will proceed no further. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes."

With these instances before you, you will readily call to mind another;—that of the holy prophet Isaiah. He was favoured with a glorious vision of the divine majesty. The account is given in the sixth chapter of his prophecies. "In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the Seraphim: each one had six wings: with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried: and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me! I am undone! for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

Now the impressions here made are in all the three cases similar: they are deep impressions of

personal unworthiness and sinfulness, confounding the soul in the divine presence. And they are, in each case, made upon the mind of a holy and devoted man: and, yet further, they are all produced by the same means—simply by an extraordinary display of the divine glory: and that—not made in works of terror and vengeance, but for purposes of goodness and mercy.

But why, we may be ready to ask, why should the great and overpowering impression produced in all these cases be that of the sinfulness and moral pollution of the parties concerned? That the most exalted of creatures brought into the presence of his Creator, should feel himself lost in insignificance and meanness—this may be well conceived: it is nothing but what is natural and reasonable. But why should good and holy men, like Job, and Isaiah, and St. Peter, be thus overwhelmed with the sense of guilt and pollution? Here, brethren, here especially, lies the instructiveness of all these narratives. While man remains a stranger to God, he can be well satisfied with the virtue of his own character. While he has but distant and indistinct conceptions of the divine holiness, his sense of his own imperfection will be proportionably indistinct and slight. While he knows not what is due to God, he can be easily satisfied with what he himself renders.

While he knows not what he ought, in his own person, to be, he can even think with complacency of what he is. But now let the veil be drawn aside: let the mists and darkness of this fallen world be dispersed: let the Almighty stand disclosed in his glory—particularly in the glories of his purity and holiness: let heaven be in some degree opened to a man's view: let him catch a glimpse of the worship of the seraphim before the throne: let him but apprehend aright—even in some slight degree aright—what he himself, as well as what his worship presented to Almighty God ought to be: then all the fabric of his self-complacency will be overthrown in a moment; and, unless encouragement derived from some far higher source than that of his own merits or innocency, be effectually communicated to his mind—he will not only say, "I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes,"—"Woe is me, I am undone,"—"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord," but his self-flattery will be exchanged for terror and despair. Now, not only will his acknowledged sins appear before him, clothed with a heinousness and criminality of which he had before no conception; but his very righteousnesses, wherein he trusted, will appear to him both so defective and so polluted, as to call for punishment, and not for reward,—to dismay,

and not to comfort him. Oh, what wandering thoughts! oh what grovelling, yea, what perverted affections! Oh, how has the heart been wanting, and even estranged! Sins of omission,—all that he has left undone, which he ought to have done,—as well as all that he has done which he ought not to have done, will appal his mind. He ought ever to have lived to God, and served him with all his powers: but he has done no such thing. Oh, what ought he to have been ever doing for the good, spiritual, and eternal, as well as temporal, of his fellow-creatures! but he has not done it. Oh! his wasted opportunities, his unimproved talents. And what has his heart been? He thought it good: but the light of the divine glory now shining into it, shews him that this was only an instance and proof of its being "deceitful above all things," that it could imagine itself good, when it was, as God himself has pronounced it, "desperately wicked."

It has been destitute of the true fear of God, of true love to God, of true faith in him, of true gratitude to him, and of devotion to his service:—nay, averted from him; inclined to those things which God abhors; utterly disinclined to those which he approves and commands. "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." And

whose mind, unless renewed and changed by the Spirit of God, is not thus carnal? Towards his fellow-creatures, where has been the love,—warm and disinterested, and self-denying,—which is "the fulfilling of the law?" On the contrary, what pride, what selfishness, what anger, what envy and jealousy, what covetousness and ambition, and vain glory! What says an Apostle? "We ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another." Many cannot conceive this to be at all true of themselves, and of any state in which they either are, or ever were. They cannot understand how St. Paul, whose sincerity and moral virtue, even while he persecuted the church of Christ, they think to be one cause why he obtained mercy—they cannot understand how *he* should include himself in such a description: they are ready to think, that, though he says, "We ourselves also," he means, not ourselves, but only you Gentiles. The fact is, this is one of those "things of the Spirit of God," which "the natural man receiveth not, and cannot know, because they are spiritually discerned." But now only let "God, who caused the light to shine out of darkness, shine into the hearts," even of those very persons, and discover himself to them "glorious in holi-

ness, fearful in praises;" make them apprehend what God is, and what man ought to be; and then the whole mystery will be revealed to them; they will no longer be embarrassed with the Apostle's words: they will perceive how they might be true of him; how they are certainly true of them: they too, will be ready to say, "Woe is me, I am undone!" "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

Brethren, be not offended at such an assertion; no, not even the most moral and virtuous among you. Your displeasure at it may be, but a working of that enmity against God and his truth, of which we speak as natural to fallen man.

Neither be averse to such a discovery now: for oh, remember, it must one day be made. The Almighty will surely one day stand revealed in more awful majesty, than he ever yet assumed to mortal eye. "Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and convince all that are ungodly among them, of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches, which ungodly sinners have spoken against him." And how terrible will it be, then first to be convinced of God's holiness and our own sinfulness, when it is too late to repent of our sins, and to lay hold on God's covenant, "that we may make peace with him." 'Then will it be too late to knock

when the door shall be shut; too late to cry for mercy when it is the time of justice.'

Blessed be God, this is not now the case: and hence we proceed to shew,

II. THE DIRECTION TO BE GIVEN TO SUCH IMPRESSIONS AND FEELINGS AS THOSE DESCRIBED IN THE TEXT, WHEN THEY ARE PRODUCED IN THE MIND.

The suggestion of nature under convictions of guilt is, to fly from God. Our fallen first parents exemplified it. "Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden." St. Peter expressed it, when he said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

But, blessed be God, all this is unnecessary, it is all improper: in flying *from* God shall we find ruin: if under our sense of guilt we turn *to* him, we shall find that he is our salvation. 'Unto whom shall we fly for succour, but unto thee, O Lord, who for our sins art justly displeased?'

That it was unnecessary to fly from God, under the consciousness of guilt, was shown to Adam and Eve themselves, even when a Redeemer was yet unrevealed. God mercifully promised a Saviour before he pronounced sentence upon the offenders. And now that the Saviour has come—and has

given "his soul an offering for sin," and has thus "made reconciliation for iniquity," and "brought in everlasting righteousness"—the whole voice of the gospel of Christ, and of divine revelation at large, is to invite sinners to come unto God, to assure them of pardon, and peace, and salvation, in so doing, and to warn them that only in turning away from him, in despairing of his mercy, or in hardening themselves in their sins—will iniquity, after all "be their ruin." "Turn ye at my reproof," the Almighty proclaims, "I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you." "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way, and live. Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die." "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy help." "Take with you words, and turn to the Lord; say unto him, Take away all iniquity and receive us graciously." "I will heal your backslidings, I will love you freely." How are the blessings of the New Covenant predicted? "I will take away the heart of stone, and I will give you the heart of flesh—and your sins and iniquities will I remember no more."

If such is the language of the Old Testament, can we be surprised at that of the New? "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But, if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "In him whosoever believeth is justified from all things." "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

All these passages, which do but exhibit the whole drift and tenor of Scripture upon this subject, must sufficiently shew the direction which should be given to convictions and feelings, in any degree resembling those described in my text; and for which we have all so much need. We have no need to fly from God under them, but ought promptly and confidently to betake ourselves to his mercy in Christ Jesus our Lord. So far from saying, as nature dictated to St. Peter to say on this occasion, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord:" our only hope, our only resource, (and an all-sufficient hope

it is,) is to prostrate ourselves before him, and to pray, 'Draw nigh to me, O Lord, who now desire to draw nigh to thee, after all my wanderings: I am a sinful man, O Lord: therefore I come unto thee, who only canst pardon my sins, who only canst cleanse my heart; for thy name's sake, O Lord, and according to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord, "pardon mine iniquity, for it is great." "Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities; create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." "I have gone astray like a sheep that is lost; seek thy servant, for I now no longer forget thy word." For thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, forgive me all that is past: and grant that I may ever hereafter serve and please thee in newness of life, so that at last I may come to thine eternal joy.'

Oh, brethren, it is not our sense of guilt and danger, even compelling us to cry out, "Woe is me, I am undone," that shall ever hurt us, if it have this result. If it thus drive us to God's mercy in Christ Jesus, the pang of godly sorrow shall then soon give place to the joy of pardon,—to "peace and joy in believing,"—and we shall say, "O Lord I will praise thee! though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me." "Being justified by faith,

we shall have peace with God, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Consider the issue in all those cases, which have been specially referred to. "The Lord turned the captivity of Job; and the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning." To Isaiah it was proclaimed—not, "Thou art mistaken in thy gloomy apprehensions of sinfulness and guilt:" Scripture never administers comfort by suggesting that men's opinion of their own sinfulness is excessive; no, but "Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged;" and he was in consequence employed on a high and holy commission, as a prophet of God. And our Lord, so far from departing from Simon Peter, bade him, "Fear not;" called him henceforth to constant attendance upon him; and constituted him a chief apostle, and main instrument in founding and edifying his church.

Yes, brethren, true religion has its very beginning in conviction of sin, and guilt, and danger. We will not say how deep this conviction must be in order to the existence of religion: but in proportion to its depth, is very commonly the height to which all other parts of the Christian character rise, the vigour with which they flourish: and it is by Christian churches generally coming to be composed of persons who know little by per-

sonal conviction, of their own hearts, and of the evil of sin, and of the power and riches of divine grace, that they decline, and religion dies away in them. Yes, neither our safety nor even our present happiness, is endangered by the admission of a deep, and penetrating, and, for the time, painful conviction of the depravity of our hearts and the sinfulness of our lives, and of the evil and desert of sin: but our danger lies, (and oh, it is imminent,) on the contrary side, in the want of a heart-affecting sense of these things. Yes: hence it is that so many of you practically neglect the Saviour in whom you profess to believe, and that all so undervalue him. He is a physician, but you are not sick, or you "heal your wound slightly." Hence it is, that we have so little sense of the value of the gospel, and live so little under the influence of its principles. Hence it is, that so many will stay indolently at home, almost within the sound of it, and not give it a hearing: hence that so many can come to hear it, merely as the customary employment of one or two half hours in the week; that many can come with idle curiosity, and scarcely even that; many as critics and judges of the preacher, instead of sinners, asking, "What must I do to be saved?" and some almost sneer at the idea of people getting material 'good' by what they hear. O may the

Spirit of God perform his promised office, by convincing you of sin, and what different hearers and readers of the gospel will you become! "The full soul despiseth the honeycomb: but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet." The soul indeed convinced of sin, will understand as no other can do, the meaning of the prophet's words; "how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation;" and thus directed to the Saviour and receiving from him, "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness," it will go "and shew forth his praise." It will live to his glory, demonstrating the efficacy of its faith, and adorning the doctrines of its Saviour by all "the fruits of righteousness," and ready to proclaim to others the Saviour, whom it hath found so precious—

'To point to his atoning blood,
And say, Behold the way to God.'

SERMON XI.

ISAIAH LIX. 19.

WHEN THE ENEMY SHALL COME IN LIKE A FLOOD, THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD SHALL LIFT UP A STANDARD AGAINST HIM.

THE chapter before us speaks largely of the iniquities of Israel, and of the calamities consequent upon them. "None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity and speak lies; they conceive mischief and bring forth iniquity.... Therefore is judgment far from us, neither doth justice overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness.... Judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey." But, in the midst of these sad circumstances, it is declared, God will behold, look down from heaven, and visit his church; will revive his own cause, and establish righteousness

triumphant in the earth. "The Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment. And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor"—or none to interpose effectually against prevailing evil, and on behalf of oppressed truth and righteousness: "therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness it sustained him." He is then described as arming himself as a warrior for the conflict. "For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke. According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies: to the islands he will repay recompence." And then what is the glorious result? "So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him. And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord."

What particular interposition of God in behalf of his church and people is specially predicted, I shall not at all minutely inquire. He interposed for them when he restored the Jews from Babylon,

and re-established his long-suspended ordinances among them. He interposed for them in a glorious manner when he sent his Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, into the world; to redeem us to God with his blood, and to revive and extend his church. And to these occasions the passage may in a measure apply. But from the circumstance of its apparently introducing a description of that happy state which the church, and even the world at large, it would seem, is eventually to enjoy; as well as from the application of it to the future conversion of the Jews, some of the most judicious commentators understand it as referring to times not remote from our own—as describing the fallen state of many professed Christian churches in these latter ages; and the glorious interposition of the divine power and grace which shall restore them, and introduce a happier state of things both to Jews and Gentiles, than the world has ever yet witnessed.

From the words of the text we will consider,

I. What is to be understood by "THE ENEMY COMING IN LIKE A FLOOD:" And

II. In what way "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD WILL LIFT UP A STANDARD AGAINST HIM."

I. When "THE ENEMY" is spoken of as "COMING IN LIKE A FLOOD," it seems obvious that a bad state

of God's professing church, and of the cause of truth and righteousness generally, is intended. It means such a state of things as we have seen that the chapter describes. But, by analogy, the words may be applied to cases of Christian experience—to the state and feelings of individual minds, on many occasions. And we will first endeavour briefly to illustrate them in that view.

Often from the very commencement of divine life in the soul, cases occur, which to the person concerned, may seem to be well described by the words under consideration. What is a more common or more natural commencement of true religion in the sinner, than conviction, perhaps a painful and alarming conviction, of sin, of guilt, of danger, of exposure to the wrath of God. If upon every one that believeth not in the Son of God, "the wrath of God abideth," what more natural or more necessary means to bring him out of that state, than to make him sensible that it really is his state; and that he has need therefore to ask, "What must I do to be saved?" But, when these convictions are powerful, and also new to the mind, they render it the prey of temptations to despair. Man must have his false confidences torn from him, that he may be led to repose on that which is true. But the ground of true confidence he perhaps as yet discerns not, or he dis-

cerns it but indistinctly. When deprived therefore of that self-satisfaction in which he has hitherto rested, his all seems to be taken from him. Satan avails himself of this state of mind to harass him with new temptations. Whereas before, this enemy of souls would insinuate, that since God is merciful there was no need to fear, and that it was time enough yet to seek his face; so now, he will suggest, that, as God is just, there is no sufficient ground for a sinner to hope. In this state of mind, amid this darkness and temptation, perhaps the evils of the heart, and its natural enmity against God, will seem rather to be roused than subdued: and the feeling may resemble that which St. Paul describes: "When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." Sin and Satan, temptation and despair, may threaten to overwhelm the soul. "The enemy cometh in like a flood."

Yes, and on many subsequent occasions, even the mind that has found peace with God through Jesus Christ, may have renewed difficulties of the same kind to contend with. His views are clouded; his former joys are, for the time, fled; God hideth his face; he has no liberty in prayer; his heart seems to be hard and his faith out of exercise. Evils, that he hoped were subdued, revive and shew themselves. He feels his mind to be irritable: and, while he cannot but be sensi-

ble that negligence and sin have brought him into this state, still "his heart fretteth against the Lord." He fears that he may, after all his better hopes, "become like them that go down to the pit" of destruction—a partaker of their sins, a partner of their doom. "Iniquities,"—he mournfully exclaims,—"Iniquities prevail against me!" "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" "The enemy cometh in like a flood."

It is not however God's purpose to leave his tried and tempted, even though offending servant, "in the enemy's hand, nor to condemn him when he is judged:" but only "to humble him, and prove him, and shew him what is in his heart—to do him good at his latter end."

In each of these cases the individual may apply to himself the description, "The enemy cometh in like a flood:" yet let him persevere in pleading the promise, "The Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him," and he shall find it fulfilled to his soul.

But we proceed to illustrate the meaning of "the enemy coming in like a flood," with reference to the state of things within, or around the church at large.

Turn back to the period of the general deluge. Then "God looked upon the earth, and behold it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way

upon the earth." Then the church of God was confined to the one family of Noah, or even within still narrower limits—for not all Noah's family were pious and blessed.

Look to the time of Abraham. When God had cut off the wicked by the flood, and peopled the earth afresh from the one family of Noah;—we might have hoped that God had planted the world anew with "wholly a right seed;" and that the astonishing display which had been made of his judgments and his mercies, would have produced a lasting and salutary impression upon mankind. But in the time of Abraham we find them fast sinking into idolatry, and all the vices which are its natural accompaniments.

To what a state was the church reduced again, when Israel, the only professed people of God, had been even for ages enslaved to Egyptian idolaters, and deeply corrupted by their impieties and superstitions.

What again was its condition in the time of the judges, and under the reigns of many of the idolatrous kings? And what, when the city and temple of Jerusalem were destroyed, and the whole people carried into captivity?

What, in fine, was its situation in the time of our blessed Lord; when, as he testified, quoting the words of the prophet, "in vain did they worship

God, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men:" when the church was corrupted within, and oppressed from without by the dominion of idolaters.

The state of the Christian church on many occasions has been little more promising. How was it, for a long period, threatened with utter extermination, by the rage of heathen persecutors: and how soon from within its own body, "did men arise speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." Christian truth was soon lamentably corrupted by the unhallowed admixtures of a vain philosophy. Scarcely had three or four centuries passed, when the doctrine of Arius, denying the foundation of the faith,—the Godhead of the Redeemer,—and that of Pelagius,—explaining away the doctrine of human depravity, and consequently the necessity for the work of the Holy Spirit in man's recovery,—threatened to supplant and supersede all divine truth within the visible church. Afterwards image worship was established by emperors, and by ecclesiastical councils. And with error of doctrine, viciousness of life every where kept pace.

Passing over the intermediate state of darkness in the Christian church, if we look to our own times, there is reason in many points of view, to exclaim, "The enemy cometh in like a flood."

True religion indeed has been eminently revived, and we trust spreads widely among us. A blessed spirit of zeal to extend the religion of the Bible, and thus to promote the glory of God and the good of mankind, is manifested, and promises blessed results: yet when, on the other hand, we see how much Christians are divided; how much Christian doctrine is perverted; what almost hopeless corruption of manners spreads itself among all classes of society; and how many efforts are made to turn the extended education of the people into a means of injuring their principles, instead of improving them, there is much indeed to check our hopes. In many ways the observant and discerning eye sees reason to tremble on the one hand, no less than to rejoice on the other. So much does "the enemy" of all good even now "come in like a flood;" and so much do we need for ourselves, and for our children, and for our church and our country, and for Christendom, and for the world at large, the consolation of the promise, "The Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him."

II. THIS PROMISE we proceed in the second place to consider, particularly as to the WAYS IN WHICH IT IS FULFILLED.

And here, as before, let us look first to the case

of individuals. Look to the awakened sinner: look to the mourning penitent, tempted to despair, and exclaiming, "My sins have taken such hold upon me, that I am not able to look up, and my heart hath failed me." Only let him go on to add, "Let it be thy good pleasure to deliver me! O Lord, make haste to help me;" let him persevere in such supplications—and God will not leave him a prey to the enemy of his soul. He will interpose with the promises of his word, and the consolations of his Spirit. "He hath torn, and he will heal, he hath smitten, and he will bind him up." We would say to such an one, "Seek unto God," in the way that he hath appointed thee, and "to him commit thy cause." Look unto "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world:" and so doing, "O tarry thou the Lord's leisure; be strong, and he shall comfort thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord." For what else are written all the gracious passages of God's word,—"I am he that blotteth out thine iniquities for mine own sake."—"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."—"The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin."—"In him whosoever believeth, is justified from all things." Exercise thine heart in these and similar passages: implore of God to give thee faith to believe them: and thou too shalt say, "O Lord, I

will praise thee; though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me."

And so again of the tempted and afflicted believer: "God is faithful who will not suffer him to be tempted above that he is able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that he may be able to bear it." When David exclaimed, "Iniquities prevail against me;" he was enabled to add, "As for our transgressions, thou shalt take them away." When St. Paul cried, "O wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me?" he was enabled to say, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" "These things," and numberless others such as these, "are written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." "The God of patience and consolation," the God "that comforteth them that are cast down," will comfort us in every time of need, if we look to him. Out of all our troubles will he deliver us. He may suffer things often apparently to approach to extremities with us, but 'man's extremity is God's opportunity:' and "when the enemy cometh in like a flood," and threateneth to sweep away all before him, then, if not before, "the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him."

And so, with respect to the church at large: it

is "founded upon the rock; the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Look to past times. When the world was sinking into idolatry after the flood, and the church of God was threatened with extinction, then God "raised up the righteous man from the east;" he called Abraham to be "the father of the faithful;" he separated him from the rest of the world, and in so doing, laid the foundation of all his future dispensations to his church to this day, and to the end of time. "In him and in his seed are all the nations of the earth to be blessed."

When the posterity of Abraham were almost lost in Egyptian bondage and idolatry, then did God raise up Moses; elevated him, notwithstanding the weakness and distrust which he at first shewed, into a hero, who "feared not the wrath of the king," but led out God's people triumphantly from among the oppressors,—God's "right hand and his holy arm" being manifestly displayed before them.

And so, when in the times of the judges things were often reduced to the lowest extremity with Israel because of their sins,—the Lord raised them up deliverers. "And, when the Lord raised them up judges, then the Lord was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the Lord because of their groanings by reason of

them that oppressed them and vexed them." And of these judges, Samuel, the last of the number, was a zealous and successful reformer, beyond what we commonly suppose: and his administration made way for that of David and Solomon.

And afterwards under the ungodly kings of Judah and Israel, God raised up the prophets, and by them "lifted up his standard" against prevailing impiety and iniquity, and kindled a light which has cast its bright beams through all succeeding ages. And even the very worst of all the kings of Judah, Ahaz, who shut up the temple, suppressed the public worship of God, and established idolatry, was succeeded by Hezekiah, the most devoted reformer of them all.

And so again at the close of the captivity, he stirred up the spirits of Zerubbabel, and Joshua the High Priest, and of Ezra and Nehemiah; yes, and even disposed the heart of Cyrus, the King of Persia, to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, and to re-establish the people of Israel and the worship of God. Thus are "all hearts in his hands, and he turneth them whithersoever he pleaseth," and never can he want willing and sufficient instruments.

What he did for his fallen and decayed church, by sending his own Son to it—by pouring the Holy Spirit from on high upon it—by qualifying

and sending forth the Apostles into the world, I need not say. "Thou, O God, sentest a gracious rain upon thine inheritance, and refreshest it when it was weary." "The Lord gave the word, and great was the company of them that published it," and glorious their success. And in subsequent ages of the Christian church God has never left himself without effectual witnesses against prevailing corruptions. Cyprian, and Athanasius, and Ambrose, and Augustine, and Chrysostom, were in their several ages God's standard-bearers by whom he "lifted up a banner for the truth," and effectually opposed the enemy, when "he came in like a flood." At length he raised Wycliffe, and Huss, and Martin Luther, and Melancthon, and Zuingle, and Cranmer, and all the glorious host of the heroes of the reformation, and wrought a blessed deliverance in the earth. And God has still continued in the same manner to protect and revive his church, and nowhere more than in our own favoured country.

When, therefore, we are disposed to take a desponding view of things, let us remember the language of the prophet: "why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the

Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint." Brethren, this is precisely the duty which our text and our subject inculcate—that we should wait upon the Lord with good courage, assured that of him cometh our salvation.

Let me then conclude with enforcing this duty. Indeed, we may perhaps be allowed to divide it into the two duties of waiting *earnestly upon* God, and waiting *patiently for* his time of interposing for us. You will find both implied in the first verse of the fortieth Psalm; and the happy result of them in the following part of that Psalm. "I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry."

SERMON XII.

HEBREWS VI. 18.

THAT . . . WE MIGHT HAVE A STRONG CONSOLATION, WHO HAVE FLED FOR REFUGE TO LAY HOLD UPON THE HOPE SET BEFORE US.

RELIGION is a subject of deep and everlasting interest to every human mind. If it is not felt to be so, there is a fatal error at the root of any respect with which it is regarded. It may be well, in a secondary point of view, to look to it as a means of preserving good order in society: it may be well to uphold it as occupying an important place among the institutions of our country: but if we regard it only or even mainly in such lights as these, we have no religion in our own hearts, whatever we may wish others to have. On the contrary, we are looking only to this world, and not to the world to come: we are looking to man, and not to God; and to man considered merely as a member of earthly society, and not to man as the heir of immortality. We are "in darkness

even until now." The question, "What must I do to be saved?" is the anxious inquiry with which every one must approach the subject of religion, who would desire to understand its nature, and to enjoy its benefits.

The chapter before us in every part suggests this reflection on the personal nature of religion. It speaks of some who had gone far in religion, both in the understanding of it, and in feeling certain of its "powers," but who had since drawn back in such a manner, that it was become, (humanly speaking, at least,) "impossible to renew them to repentance." It expresses a confidence of "better things" being found in others, even "things that accompanied salvation:" nevertheless, upon them it urges "giving the same diligence unto the full assurance of hope unto the end:" and it speaks, as you have heard in my text, of the "strong consolation" provided for those who sought it in the right way: "that by two immutable things"—the immutable counsel or promise, and the immutable oath of God, by which he had been pleased to confirm his covenant—"that by two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie, they might have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to the hope set before them."

Let us consider these two particulars, the "flee-

ing for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us," and the "strong consolation" which it is the will of God they should have who do so.

I. Here is "strong consolation," it appears, provided,—but it is only for CERTAIN CHARACTERS, for them who "have fled for refuge to the hope set before them." "Fleeing for refuge" implies a sense of danger, or even alarm. No man takes refuge, still less does any man "*flee* for refuge," who feels not himself exposed to danger.

Now this very first step towards safety "consolation," and good hope, is wanting in most men. Examine yourselves, brethren. What does your experience, and the history of your lives present like "fleeing for refuge?" or like that sense of danger which would urge to such a course. Many, I am too well persuaded, have felt nothing of the kind. Perhaps the effect and the very design of such religion as they possess, is to ward off convictions, and to render them insensible of danger and of the consequent necessity of "fleeing for refuge." Sin, they acknowledge, exposes us to danger: but Christ has died for our sins: they are Christians, they have been baptised, and they never made void their baptism by any flagrant sins: therefore they are safe: there is no need, they hope, for them to flee any whither for refuge. What

can they have to fear? Brethren, I verily believe this is the course of thought which passes through the minds of many among us; which they cherish, and would even defend. Thus they make the existence of Christianity, and their profession of it, the very pretext for neglecting the first duty which Christianity calls upon them to perform, if they would ever save their souls! "The heart is deceitful above all things." Young persons, I am persuaded, are trained to cherish that false security of which we speak.

Brethren, the first step towards being brought right, is to be roused from this false security. We must be made sensible, each of us of his own sins, and guilt, and danger. What mean we by confessing our sins, as we do in words, and really feeling nothing about them? While this is the case, we are "dead in trespasses and sins," and "the wrath of God abideth on us." We are in infinite danger: and are sleeping under it, and dreaming vain dreams of security, while sudden destruction is likely to come upon us. If you have never felt your danger, you never can have "fled for refuge:" and if you have never fled for refuge, in vain has the gospel been provided, as far as *you* are concerned. Be roused by this consideration, and dismiss it not from your minds till it has wrought a thorough change in you.

Then, in the next place, the language under consideration implies that there is "a refuge" for us. Yes, blessed be God, there is a refuge indispensably necessary even for the most virtuous; a refuge all-sufficient even for "the chief of sinners." None that fleeth to it shall perish: none that neglecteth it can be saved. Sin is the only source of our danger: in Christ, but in him alone is there deliverance from our sins. He hath "for ever put away sin," on behalf of all who believe in him, by making atonement for it. On our truly believing in him he will take away all our sin by actually pardoning it. By giving to us his Holy Spirit, he will also destroy the power of our sins over us, and enable us to walk at liberty in the way of God's commandments. And in this way he will ensure to us the blessings of everlasting life, instead of leaving us exposed to "the wrath to come." This is "the hope set before us," of which we are to lay hold. No sinner needs complain of the want of provision for him: none is excepted, none is excluded—save him who excludes himself by not "fleeing" to the refuge. "All things are ready" for us in Christ: so far from the refuge being closed against us, God sends forth his messengers, to "compel" us by every means of entreaty and persuasion, to come in.

But, in the third place, these points of "fleeing

to the refuge," and "laying hold on the hope," deserve to be particularly noticed. Faith in Christ, is the means of our salvation. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "Whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." But what is it to "believe," or to have "faith" in Christ? It is needless to say, that this saving faith must be much more than a mere profession—more than calling Christ our Saviour, and assenting to the truth of his religion and his doctrines. Multitudes do this, who neither love Christ nor obey him. But no faith avails which does not "work by love;" and no love is acknowledged as true which does not produce obedience. What then is it to believe in Christ? Scripture illustrates this by many significant figures, but those now before us are highly expressive. To believe in Christ is "to flee" to him "for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before us." Undoubtedly there is a reference to the man-slayer fleeing to the "city of refuge" among the Jews. With this the Hebrews would be familiar. In order, we may suppose, to inspire a horror at taking away the life of man, even a person who slew another unwittingly, might be put to death by the next of kin to the deceased, who was therefore styled "the avenger of blood." But then for the protection

of the innocent,—whose misfortune, and not his crime, it had been to deprive a fellow-creature of life,—cities of refuge were appointed in the various quarters of the land, which were well known, and the way to them clearly marked out, and the person who under such circumstances fled to one of these cities was safe: the avenger of blood could not touch him. This divine institution was a type of Christ, to whom we are to flee for refuge from the just wrath of God against our sins; and by an allusion to it, the apostle seems here most aptly and strikingly to illustrate that faith in Christ whereby we are to be saved. The man-slayer felt his danger: he thankfully availed himself of the divine appointment: for the prescribed time forsaking his home, turning his back on the world, renouncing all he had held dear, he fled straightway to the city of refuge, and never stopped till he found himself safely lodged within its walls. Mark what earnestness of mind was here: what decision: what "counting all but loss" for the sake of gaining the city of refuge, and thus escaping the avenger of blood, and saving his own otherwise devoted life. Brethren, this is a scriptural illustration of the exercise of faith in Christ. Examine yourselves. Has there been, in your supposed faith in Christ, anything resembling this? Surely there cannot have been

without some consciousness on your part. Has the sense of sin and danger ever thus pressed home upon your heart? Have you ever thus practically felt that you had no hope of escaping the wrath of God, and everlasting damnation, but only in Christ? Did it ever thus become practically, your most anxious concern to be "found in Christ?" Have you ever thus earnestly betaken yourselves to him? Have you thus, with all the fervency of which your souls were capable, asked of him all the blessings of salvation? Oh! "the prayer of faith" is no cold and formal service: no mere labour of the lips, from which the heart is absent. Have you thus determined to ask till you received—to seek till you found? And have you never rested till you had good reason to be satisfied that you had obtained what you thus sought—pardon and peace with God? And has it been evinced by your newness of life, that your confidence was not a delusion?

Thus does the true believer in Christ "flee for refuge" to him. Thus does he with trembling earnestness "lay hold on the hope set before" him; with such earnestness as the drowning man grasps the rope that is thrown out to save him.

Consider, I say, brethren, these are among the scriptural illustrations of the nature and exercise

of faith in Christ. Thus does it feel the want and the value of the blessing sought; with such earnestness does it seek that blessing; thus does it part with all which stands in the way of obtaining it; thus does it never rest till the blessing is secured.

May you not now, brethren, understand the difference between "a dead" and a "living faith?" All this earnestness, this exertion, this energy, demonstrates life: but the coldness, the languor, the indifference which so many shew where their eternal all is at stake; perhaps the languor, the coldness, the indifference, which *you* shew—does it not demonstrate death? A faith of the latter kind, is a mere name, it will avail nothing: it will leave its possessor to perish in his sins. But the former is alive, it is active; at present perhaps it "moves" the man "by fear;" but by and by, it will "constrain him by love," and prompt him to all holy obedience. It will save his soul. Oh! we beseech you, rest in nothing short of it. If your professed Christian faith has hitherto been anything rather than this active earnest principle—oh! deceive not yourselves with it: you have never "fled for refuge," you have as yet no portion in the "strong consolation" provided for those, and only for those who have done so.

II. Of that "STRONG CONSOLATION" we proceed in the next place to speak.

The strength of our consolations must depend on two things; the value of the blessings in which we rejoice; and the certainty we have of attaining them.

On the value of the blessings themselves here presented to us, we need hardly enlarge. They are the pardon of all our sins, instead of the condemnation due to them: the favour of Almighty God, instead of his awful and eternal wrath: communion with him, instead of estrangement from him: the grace of his Holy Spirit restoring us to holiness and "the glorious liberty of the children of God," instead of our continuing the slaves of sin and Satan, under "the bondage of corruption:" the comfort of God's promises as we pass through life, assuring us that "all things work together for good to them that love God," and that the troubles of life are but "a light and momentary affliction, working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory:" "a hope full of immortality" in our death, and after death the perfect fruition of the Divine presence in which is "fulness of joy," and "pleasures at God's right hand for evermore." Well may we say, "Eye hath not seen, O God, neither hath ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things

which thou hast prepared for them that love thee!" "O Lord God of hosts, blessed is the man whose hope is in thee."

These spiritual blessings indeed may present nothing to attract the heart and move the feelings of the natural man: he might rather rejoice to be assured of "his corn, and oil, and wine,"—his earthly wealth and state—increasing; but to the renewed mind they present everything after which its affections go forth—everything that its heart can desire. May but these blessings be assured to it, and it shall be for ever satisfied—yea, it overflows with joy.

But can a poor unworthy sinful creature be assured of such blessings? Hear the text: it is the express divine provision and appointment, "that by two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie"—or to fail those who take him at his word—"they might have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them." God hath been pleased to provide, not only deliverance, but blessedness; not only future blessedness, but present "consolation," yea, "strong consolation;" not only final salvation, but the present "joy of his salvation;" yea, a salvation in which they may "greatly rejoice, even though now for a season they may be in heaviness through manifold temptations" or

trials. The apostle specifies "the immutability" of the divine counsel, which purposed this, or the immutability of the divine promise which engaged for it, and of the divine oath by which, in condescension to our weakness, it pleased God to confirm his promise. And, brethren, when we consider that "God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all," can we for a moment hesitate about anything else? "How shall he not with him, freely give us all things?" Yes, "His thoughts are not as our thoughts, neither his ways as our ways: for as the heaven is higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts." He gives not according to our poor low expectations, much less according to our deserts, but "according to the riches of his glory;" not as we are worthy to receive, but as it is worthy of Him to give.

Yet, it will be said, no doubt the blessings of the gospel afford a ground of "strong" and all-sufficient "consolation" to those to whom they really belong: but how are we to know that they belong to us? This indeed opens another and just subject of inquiry. But, brethren, the text furnishes you with the means of solving the question. For whom is all this "strong consolation" designed? who are "to have" it? You have

heard: all those who have "fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope." Have you thus fled, are you thus fleeing to Christ, in the earnest desires of your heart, with humble, fervent prayer for his blessings? Do you renounce every other ground of hope, all confidence in yourselves, and all reliance on any worldly good, to take Christ as your only portion? Do you "count all but loss for him, that you may win him and be found in him?" Is this "the hope," the blessing which you wish to embrace and ever hold fast as "all your salvation and all your desire?" Is this what passes in your heart before God, and what you wish to act up to in your conduct? May you not then be conscious that you have fled, that you are fleeing to Christ to lay hold on the hope set before you in him? Say then with an eminent saint justly venerated in our church: 'The world may shake, the pillars of the earth may tremble under us; the countenance of the heaven may be appalled, the sun may lose his light, the moon her beauty, the stars their glory; but, concerning the man that trusteth in God.... what is there in the world that shall change his heart, overthrow his faith, alter his affection towards God, or the affection of God to him? If *I* be of this note, who shall make a separation between me and my God? "shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or

famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" No: "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature," shall ever prevail so far over me. "I know in whom I have believed;" I am not ignorant whose precious blood hath been shed for me; I have a shepherd full of kindness, full of care, and full of power: unto Him I commit myself; his own finger hath engraven this sentence on the tables of my heart: "Satan hath desired to have thee, that he may sift thee as wheat, but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not:" Therefore the assurance of my hope I will labour to keep, as a jewel, unto the end; and by labour, through the gracious mediation of his prayer, I shall keep it.'

Thus wrote, and thus preached the 'judicious' Hooker in the time of his health; and, when death came, his last words were, 'God hath heard my daily petitions, for I am at peace with all men, and He is at peace with me: and from that blessed assurance I feel that inward joy which this world can neither give nor take from me.'

Have not they "a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them?"

Be this then, dearly beloved brethren, our one

great care, to take the course thus pointed out to us. Oh! you have all of you need to do it. You are all sinners against God: and sin draws after it "the wrath of God:" and in the wrath of God, infinite and everlasting evils are involved: but the means of escaping them—of having them exchanged for infinite and everlasting blessings is now open before you. The time, however, is short: your opportunities are fast elapsing: soon they will be past: a thousand things solicit your care—but oh! which of them is worthy a thought compared with everlasting death or everlasting life? Oh, be not "careful and troubled," anxious and eager "about many things," to the neglect of the "one thing needful:" while you may, "flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before you." This is necessary to all—immediately necessary.

We are backward to it: we are disinclined. But oh, consider the consequences of neglecting it. True, the feeling of danger, the feeling of alarm, and the sense of guilt as causing that feeling of danger and alarm: these are uneasy feelings: but shall we for fear of the momentary pain, forego the lasting safety, and incur the lasting, the everlasting ruin? The first steps in religion, the first "fleeing for refuge" may indeed be anxious and disquieting: but to find ourselves in the refuge—to have "laid hold on the hope" which shall

never disappoint us—shall not that be blessedness? Yes, it shall be "quietness and assurance for ever." Oh how differently may *he* feel the troubles of life—how differently look forward to death—with what different feelings send forth his thoughts into eternity, who is in "the refuge,"—who has "laid hold on the hope,"—from what any other man can do! He may say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

But remember, brethren, our religion must have this beginning, or it is not genuine, and will not be availing. There must be "the fleeing for refuge," the anxious and earnest "laying hold on the hope set before us in Christ." All security, all quietness, all peace, without this, is but a delusion. We must feel our sin: we must feel our danger: we must see Christ to be our only refuge: our faith in him must be lively, and an earnest and continued exercise of the mind. Let us not deceive ourselves with the name and profession of Christianity, without its power.

And now let all who possess this hope in any degree, cherish it, that it may grow stronger and stronger in them. Let them guard against every thing that would damp it. Let them purify

themselves from sin. Let them keep themselves at this time especially, unspotted from the world. "Let your moderation," brethren, in all the affairs of this life, "be known unto all men: the Lord is at hand." "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." "Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame." While you aim to do your duties in the world, become not "men of the world," or *like* men of the world, who have "their portion in this life."

SERMON XIII.

EPHESIANS III. 14—19.

FOR THIS CAUSE I BOW MY KNEES UNTO THE FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, OF WHOM THE WHOLE FAMILY IN HEAVEN AND EARTH IS NAMED, THAT HE WOULD GRANT YOU, ACCORDING TO THE RICHES OF HIS GLORY, TO BE STRENGTHENED WITH MIGHT, BY HIS SPIRIT IN THE INNER MAN; THAT CHRIST MAY DWELL IN YOUR HEARTS BY FAITH; THAT YE, BEING ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN LOVE, MAY BE ABLE TO COMPREHEND WITH ALL SAINTS, WHAT IS THE BREADTH, AND LENGTH, AND DEPTH, AND HEIGHT; AND TO KNOW THE LOVE OF CHRIST, WHICH PASSETH KNOWLEDGE, THAT YE MIGHT BE FILLED WITH ALL THE FULNESS OF GOD.

IT has been justly observed that the Apostles' prayers for their Christian converts, deserve our special attention. They not only shew the piety and the benevolent affection of those who offered them, but they teach us what objects we should peculiarly desire and seek after, for ourselves and for our fellow Christians. The Apostles on these occasions prayed, as well as wrote, under the

particular inspiration of the Holy Ghost: they asked therefore "according to the will of God;" and we are sure that what they asked was of the most desirable kind. Two such prayers, detailed at some length, occur in this epistle;—one, that of the text; the other, in the first chapter: and another is found in the first chapter of the next epistle. We cannot here recite them all: that which has been read to you will furnish us with abundant matter for our present meditation. Indeed it is one of those passages which almost overwhelm and confound our faculties, by the greatness of their contents: and I feel that all which I can offer, will form not even an attempt at a worthy illustration of it, but only some hints to call your attention to it, and to afford some direction to your thoughts upon it. May the passage indeed arrest our attention! May he who inspired it, 'enlarge our hearts' to some apprehension of its meaning! May he fix our desires upon such objects as are here asked; and lead us to seek them with the expectation of faith! We are "not straightened in him:" may we not be so straightened as we are in our own hearts.

I shall propose no other method in my discourse, than that of the several clauses of the text, as they succeed each other.

The Apostle has been speaking of "the grace

given unto him," who was "less than the least of all saints," "that he should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,"—the unsearchable riches of his pardoning mercy—of his sanctifying grace—of his saving, glorifying power. In executing this ministry, he encountered continual persecutions and afflictions. Under all these, he was so supported, that he scarcely felt the danger of "fainting" himself; but he feared lest his converts should be moved by them. Therefore he says "I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory." They might rather "glory" in seeing him undergoing such things in their behalf, and receiving such support under them. But he was not content with intreating them not to faint: his confidence was rather "in the Lord concerning them;" and to Him he addressed himself in prayer.

"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." It is in this character of "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," that Almighty God is ever to be approached by us sinners; of the God who has revealed himself unto us by Jesus Christ, that God of *holiness*, who would not pardon sin and save sinners but through the sacrifice of his Son: that God of *love*, who "spared not his own Son, but delivered him up

for us all," "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Through Jesus Christ his Son, he "waiteth to be gracious unto us"—to receive and answer our prayers. By him we may have "access with confidence;" but "no man cometh unto the Father but by him."

"Of whom," saith the Apostle, most sublimely and beautifully, "the whole family in heaven and earth is named." The idea is delightful. It implies what one of our hymns thus expresses:—

> 'The saints on earth, and all the dead
> But one communion make.'

They all form but one "family"—the members of which are at present placed in different circumstances—some arrived at home, occupying the "many mansions" of their Father's house, others still on their way—"not yet arrived at the rest and the inheritance which the Lord their God giveth them:" but all alike recognized as his children—all at length to be gathered into his presence "to go no more out," but to be made even "joint heirs with Christ!" Yea, even holy angels may be considered as forming part of this one family. And therefore the Apostle to the Hebrews, in a passage too which speaks of Christians not exclusively in their future state, but of

the communion to which they are even at present admitted, scruples not to say, "ye are come .... unto an innumerable company of angels," as well as *to* "the spirits of just men made perfect:" and the whole together, he calls "the general assembly and church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven."

The Apostle speaks of all this family, as "named" from one head—one common Father—"of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." This may be understood either of Christ, or of God the Father. It might indeed be questioned whether holy angels whom we have mentioned, and who needed no redemption, could be said to be "named from Christ." But even this, I think, may be admitted: for not only is he made "head over all things to his Church,"—"angels and principalities, and powers being made subject unto him;"—but it is declared to be the purpose of God, "to gather together in one,"—*to reunite under one head*[1] "all things in Christ—both things in heaven and things in earth." Sin had, as it were, burst the bond which united heaven and earth, and had separated their inhabitants one from another—yea, ranged them under different and opposing heads; but in Christ all holy beings, those who never fell, and those who are recovered from their fall, shall

[1] ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι.—Ephes. i. 10.

be re-united : to effect this re-union of redeemed sinners with the unfallen part of God's creation, was the very purpose for which Christ's mediatorial kingdom was established : and in this view " the whole family in heaven and earth," angels as well as restored men, may be said to be " named" from him their common head, as well as from God their common Father.

To the glorious and gracious " Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"—the Author of all this stupendous scheme of mercy and salvation,—saith the Apostle, " I bow my knees,"—in solemn and devout prayer in your behalf. And this I ask of him, " That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man."

Here we have a distinct notice of the three persons of the ever-blessed and adorable Trinity—each according to his appropriate office : of the Father, as the fountain of all blessing ; of the Son, as the medium of all our access unto God, and of all his communication to us ; and of the Spirit, as the great agent by whom every thing is applied to our souls.

" That he would grant you," saith the Apostle, " according to the riches of his glory." Here is the true source of all enlargement in our expectations and our prayers. If we look to our own

worthiness, what can we expect? Nothing but punishment. If we look only to the poverty of our conceptions, and the coldness of our prayers, what can we expect? Nothing but what is comparatively mean and little. But we are to look off from both these things—to what may raise in us very different expectations. God gives not for our worthiness, nor according to our apprehensions: but "to the praise of the glory of his grace:" not what we grovelling and sinful worms deserve, or might expect to receive; but what it may become HIM to bestow. We are to look off therefore, in forming our expectations from our meanness, to his Majesty; from the poverty of our desires, to the "riches" of his possessions and his bounty.

"That he would grant you, *according to the riches of his glory* to be strengthened with might, by his Spirit, in the inner man." We read of "the old man, which is corrupt," and which we are to "put off." It means all that system of evil passions and propensities, and works following from them, which belongs to us naturally as fallen creatures. "The new man," is the opposite of this: it consists of all those new and holy dispositions and tempers, and of practices following from them which constitute the Christian character; which are the fruit of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. According to this the Apostle says, "The fruit of the

Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." As these graces are first implanted in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, so are they to be cherished and strengthened in us continually by the same Divine agent. We are " strengthened by God's Spirit in the inner man," when all these " fruits of the Spirit" increase and abound in us; when our repentance is deepened; our faith invigorated; our love made more ardent both towards our Saviour, and towards all men; our hope more animating and " full of glory:" when our hearts are fortified, and filled with zeal and boldness, a meek and holy boldness, in the cause of God, and prepared for service or for suffering with all constancy and all charity. The Apostle prays that they might be thus " strengthened with might, by God's Spirit in the inner man—according to the riches of his glory,"—in that large and abundant measure before noticed; so that, in the language of one of the prophets, " he that was feeble might be as David;" every Christian a champion in the cause of his God, and the service of his Saviour. And oh, brethren, if our hearts were enlarged, our desires drawn forth in petitions like these, how would the state of our souls be altered; how would the face of the church, and, by its means, that of the world at large be changed!

The next petition is, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." We read of "Christ *in us* the hope of glory." "If any man hear my voice," he says, "and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him and he with me." And again, "If a man love me he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." And accordingly, we read of "God dwelling in us and we in him." By "Christ's dwelling in our hearts by faith" we may understand therefore, not merely his being "precious" unto us, but our having an abiding and lively sense of his presence with us, to strengthen us, to comfort us, and to save us: so that we may say, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine:" "I will fear no evil, for thou art with me:" "I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me:" "When I am weak then am I strong" through "the power of Christ resting upon me."

That he may "dwell in your hearts by faith," shewing that it is a *spiritual* presence that is intended, which is apprehended and realized "by faith."

"That ye being rooted and grounded in love." Love is the chief grace of Christianity, without which we are "nothing" in Christ's kingdom. It is the great demand of the divine law—"Thou

shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself." It is to be the great motive and principle of all our obedience—"The love of Christ is to constrain us." "By love" we are "to serve one another." It is the great design of the Gospel in all its principles—in all its exhibitions of the divine character, in the whole of its salvation as well as in all its precepts, to recover us to the love of God and the love of man; as the temper which is not only to fulfil our duties here, but to accompany us to heaven, and there to form our bliss for ever, when faith shall have been turned into sight, and hope into enjoyment.

The Apostle prays that they might be "rooted and grounded" in this principle, so that nothing might ever move them away from it, or ever shake them in the exercise of it: that they might be "able to comprehend" in a measure—a continually increasing measure—"with all saints," as all true Christians in some degree did, and as he prayed that all might more and more do "what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge;" and which can, with all our attainments, be but imperfectly known, being, like him in whom it exists, infinite.

He desires that they "might know the love of

Christ"—might form more suitable and worthy conceptions of that love which moved him to stoop from the throne of glory, and to die upon the cross 'for us miserable sinners, who lay in darkness and the shadow of death, that he might make us the children of God, and exalt us to everlasting life:' that they might be duly impressed with it, duly influenced by it. This will in fact include every thing; such a sense of our *sins* as shall lead us to "look on Him whom we have pierced, and mourn" for them in true repentance; such a sense of the goodness of God, as shall inspire us with hope and love to him: such a sense of our obligations, as shall "constrain us to live no longer to ourselves, but unto him which died for us, and rose again." Nothing is so desirable for all the purposes both of consolation, and of holy obedience and preparation for heaven, as that "the love of God in Christ should be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto us;" and to this nothing so necessary, as that we should "know" more and more "the love of Christ, which," in its full extent, "passeth knowledge."

To this subject the Apostle applies the four terms "breadth, and length, and depth, and height." We may illustrate them by the "height" of glory from which Christ stooped, and to which he will raise all them that truly believe in him:

the "depth" of ruin in which they lay, and of suffering to which he condescended for them: the "breadth" or compass of the world to which his redemption extends—of the sins for which he suffered, and which he is ready to pardon; and of the blessings which he bestows upon every believer: and the "length" to which his love reaches: which is "from everlasting to everlasting," towards all that truly receive him as their Saviour.

As the issue of the whole, the Apostle prays, "That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God;" an expression of which it is impossible to give any adequate illustration. "With all the fulness" of blessedness which, in "the riches of his glory," he has to bestow: "with all the fulness" of conformity to his image, according to which they are ultimately to be made "pure even as he is pure."

We might well have supposed the Apostle had now carried his petitions to the utmost limit, not only of what might be hoped for, but of what was possible. But he concludes the prayer with this doxology: "Now unto him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us;" —not only "above" what even he *asked*, but above what his *thoughts* and conceptions (which are apt to be bigger than words) reached—"*abun-*

dantly above" them—yea, "*exceeding abundantly* above them *all.*" And he even implies that this was but "according to the power that already worketh in us," that "quickeneth" the sinner who was "dead in trespasses and sins"—and sanctifieth, and preserveth, and saveth the Christian believer. To him who is thus able and thus willing to do for us, he ascribeth "glory, in the church, by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen!"

And should not we, with our whole hearts join in this ascription of praise to God for "the riches of the glory" of his grace; for "the love of Christ which passeth knowledge;" for his combined "willingness and ability to do for us exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think?" Can we ever dwell enough on the contemplation of "the things which are freely given to us of God" in Christ Jesus our Lord? May God give unto us "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him." Brethren, let our prayers for ourselves, and for the whole Christian brotherhood, be conformed to such models as that before us. Let us indeed implore of "the God of all grace"—'that all who profess and call themselves Christians, may be led into the way of truth; may hold the faith in the unity of the spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness

of life:' and that all who are, or who thus become, true Christians, may be "strengthned with might by God's Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith; that they being rooted [and grounded in love, may know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge," and may constantly live and act under the due practical impression of it; that, as the Apostle's prayer in the next epistle is, "their love may abound yet more and more, in knowledge, and in all judgment; that they may approve things which are excellent; that they may be sincere and without offence unto the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the praise and glory of God."

But, brethren, are these the things which really engage our hearts and affections; which call forth our prayers and our exertions? I fear many hear and read these petitions without feeling that they present any object suited to excite their longing desires; any such desires as are excited when great worldly hopes and prospects are proposed to you! Alas! you are yet "carnally minded:" you "mind earthly things." But the end of that state of mind is "death." Implore of God that he would teach you, according to the expressive language of our collects, 'to love the things which

he doth command; and to desire,—supremely to desire,—the things which he doth promise.' So only can you expect to obtain 'the desires of your hearts; and so only, if obtained, would they conduce to your real good.' "Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thy heart." But even if taught to do this in some measure, yet how cold and languid are our desires; how low our conceptions and expectations. O Lord, enlarge our scanty thoughts. And to that end let us dwell, brethren, upon the meditation of such passages, till we rise to a higher level. "Ask and receive, that your joy may be full."

SERMON XIV.

PHILIPPIANS IV. 5.

LET YOUR MODERATION BE KNOWN UNTO ALL MEN: THE LORD IS AT HAND.

IT has often been shown that Christianity is suited not only to teach us the way of everlasting salvation, but also to make us the most happy of men in this present life. A striking illustration of this truth might be drawn from the passage to which the text belongs. Let a man only comply fully with its directions, and what could he want more. "Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again I say, rejoice." This is evidently spoken to those who have "fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them." To the impenitent and unbelieving, to all the workers of iniquity, "God is a consuming fire." But to those who are in Christ by faith, he is a reconciled Father: and they have good ground to rejoice in him at all times. It follows, "Let your moderation be known unto all men: the Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but

in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus:" for, as to him we owe the pardon of our sins, and all our hopes of final salvation; so to him also we owe, and through him we receive, all our present peace and consolation.

How happy, I say, must be the man whose temper is formed according to these rules. See it exemplified in the writer of this epistle, St. Paul, who had been at this time, four years a prisoner, for the testimony of Jesus, and was in such poverty as to be indebted to the Philippians for the relief of his necessities. A few verses after our text, he speaks thus: "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where, and in all things I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry: both to abound and to suffer need." Neither prosperity nor adversity discomposed the serenity of his mind. 'Amidst the sundry and manifold changes of this mortal life, his heart was there surely fixed where true joys are to be found.' Hence being so well inured to the practice of moderation, he was peculiarly qualified to enforce it upon others.

The text contains an EXHORTATION TO THIS DUTY, and the REASON ON WHICH THAT EXHORTATION IS FOUNDED.

We may consider,

I. THE EXHORTATION. "LET YOUR MODERATION BE KNOWN UNTO ALL MEN."

The word rendered "moderation," appears to signify, somewhat more extensively, a meek, gentle, patient composure of mind, the opposite of all boisterous turbulent passions. The moderation to which we are exhorted, implies the happy subjugation of angry passions, of covetousness, of excessive carefulness and anxiety; of ambition, and all inordinate desires of every kind. It is as far removed from that tumultuous joy produced by the gratification of such desires, as from that disconsolate sorrow or sullen dejection, which results from their disappointment. It is the offspring of piety and humble submission to the will of God; and the parent of contentment, and thankfulness, and hope, and peace.

As Christians then, you are exhorted in the book which is the depository of your faith, the foundation of your hopes, and the directory of your lives;—yea by the word of God itself you are commanded, to cultivate, and to be distinguished by moderation.

Be moderate in all your desires and pursuits of worldly good. The counsel which your religion authoritatively delivers to *you*, is the very reverse of that which the world gives to *her* sons. With men of the world, the object is to seek great things for themselves. This is their ambition in their own case: this is what by example, by all their modes of thinking, of conversing, and of acting, they inculcate upon their children. Those who have laboured successfully in this course, are looked up to, and applauded, and pointed out to the imitation of our youth, as persons, who have done well in life. "And men will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself." Thus the love of the world, too lamentably natural to the human heart, is cherished and stimulated, till it takes full possession of the soul: and "the love of the Father," is in danger of being even banished from among us.

But our divine preceptor speaks another language. It says to us, as the Lord to Baruch by his prophet Jeremiah, "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not." "These things do the nations of the world, "which know not God," seek after." But let not this, O Christian, be the principle with which *thou* settest out in life. "One thing is needful." "Let your conversation be free from covetousness, and be content with

such things as ye have." "Godliness with contentment is great gain." "Seek *ye* first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all things needful shall be added to you." "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of," and he hath said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

But who, from the observation of Christians of the present day, would imagine that such were the rules of life prescribed to them? that such was the spirit which the gospel is calculated to infuse? We see men professing Christianity, as anxious after the world—as ambitious of wealth—as contentious for honour and power—as desirous of outstripping others in display—as elated with success—as impatient of disappointment—as those who have "their portion in this life:" as if they had never been commanded,—"Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed in the renewing of your minds:" "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, but lay up treasures in heaven." "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."

But ye who would be Christians, not in name only, "flee these things." Be not seduced by that example of forgetfulness which is continually before your eyes. Do not impose upon yourselves, —while you are lost in the cares of the world—with

the idle excuses of acquiring a competency, or making provision for your families, or keeping up your appearance, or rank in the world. Neither be led by these pretences into the real—however well approved—disregard to the spirit and the precepts of the gospel. What! had not men families to provide for, had not men reputation to maintain in the world, when these precepts were delivered? Or was the author of Christianity not sufficiently considerate, with respect to what such circumstances would require of us? But sin is deceitful, and the lust of wealth is deceitful, and "they that will be rich," will never be destitute of some plea with which to silence their own consciences, while they run themselves into temptations and snares, and many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

It is necessary, however, that we explain ourselves upon the subject of which we are here speaking.

We do not mean that men should neglect their worldly professions,—and disregard their families. No, we have no wish to conceal such Scriptures as the following,—"If any man will not work, neither let him eat." What we direct you to attend to is the Scriptural exhortation, "Be not slothful in business," but be at the same time "fervent in spirit,

serving the Lord;" to make this your most earnest endeavour, your daily unremitting care. And think you, that in enjoining this, God hath commanded what is altogether impossible—what he will not give you grace to perform? Diligence in your proper calling is your duty: humbly, and with submission to God, to desire success therein is proper: but not so, to be filled with insatiable and ever-growing desires of wealth: not so, to be burying yourselves in excess of business as to distract your thoughts perpetually, and leave little time and less inclination, for the care of your souls: not so, to live to yourselves alone, as to be careless of the glory of God, and the welfare of your fellow-creatures: not so, to indulge perpetual anxieties, to be elated or depressed about your worldly affairs as if they were your all. To take care of your families is your duty: but not so, to be careful for them as if there were no God, who would live, and whose providence would act, after you were dead: or as if it were a matter of great importance that they should possess wealth and consequence in the world: or as if you could best secure their temporal interests by neglecting their eternal ones; and by venturing them, for the sake of worldly advantage, into situations which require them to transgress the holy law of God, and expose them to the contagion of evil examples: or, as if the

only way to promote their welfare was to give into that egregious, and often ruinous, however natural folly, of making it your aim to advance your children into a rank of life, for which they were never fitted by their education, and which therefore they are likely only to disgrace.

But not merely with respect to the pursuit of the world, are we to exercise moderation: we are to be moderate in all things. Moderate in our *indulgences:* moderate in all our *passions:* moderate in our *joys* and in our *sorrows:* in our *hopes* and in our *fears*.

While we avoid all excessive anxieties, we are never in such a manner to give up ourselves to ease and indulgence, as if this were our rest and home: as if we were quite at liberty to live to pleasure and enjoyment. This is one of the world's most fatal seductions. The men of the world are as immoderate in this, as in their pursuit of wealth or greatness. The Christian must never forget that the present is a state of trial; that the proper representations of his condition here, are a conflict, a race, a warfare. These are the figures which Scripture uses; and agreeably to the ideas they convey, it warns us to "take heed that our hearts be not overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, or with the cares of this life:" it admonishes us to "endure hardness," to "deny ourselves:"

to "put on the whole armour of God:" to "fight the good fight of faith:" to be "temperate in all things:" to "mortify the flesh with its affections and lusts:" "not to be slothful, but followers of them who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises:" to "give diligence to make our calling and election sure:" to "perfect holiness in the fear of God:" to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling;" as well as, "while we have time, to do good unto all men." "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil as a roaring lion goeth about seeking whom he may devour, whom resist stedfast in the faith." On no subject do we want exhortation more than on these. O where do we see this Christian sobriety, and watchfulness, and diligence! Is there then no longer need of it? Alas! never was it more needful, never did the circumstances of the times, all things considered, more loudly call for it.

Again; as Christians in all their prosperity should "rejoice with trembling:" so in all their distresses, they should sorrow, "not as those who have no hope;" but rather as those whose hope and whose ground of joy, no man, nor any outward event, can take from them. Though this is not our rest; though now we must endure hardness, and labour, and strive, and suffer too; yet "there remaineth a rest for the people of

God:" a fixed, a settled, a permanent abode, where there are no more changes, where there is no more trouble, where the wicked never enter, and the righteous "go no more out:" where the inhabitant shall not again say, 'I am sick:' where "the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell among them, and will wipe away all tears from their eyes." We should therefore moderate all our griefs; be "patient in tribulation rejoicing in hope, continuing instant in prayer."

Moderation in short should mark the Christian *character*, in all which concerns "things temporal," of whatever kind. It should mark his *character*, I say; observe the language of my text: It is not merely said, "be ye moderate;" but "let your moderation be known unto all men." Not that they were to be ostentatious in the display of it, but it was to distinguish their characters, so that it could not be hid. It is the Christian's duty and it is his wisdom: even reason itself, and regard to our own comfort, might teach us the lesson. We are not creatures who *need* much of earthly goods: and what can much do for us: it is little worth our while to be disquieted and agitated about them: what can our disquietude avail? We are not creatures whose interest lies here: and therefore it is folly to occupy ourselves

with present cares, or to suffer our hopes to terminate in a scene like this.

> Some walk in honour's gaudy show;
> Some dig for golden ore:
> They toil for heirs, they know not who,
> And straight are seen no more.

"Now this I say, brethren, the time is short. It remaineth that both they that have wives, be as though they had none; it remaineth that they that weep, as though they wept not: and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not: and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world as not abusing it." Mark diligently the concluding sentence. The world is "abused," and perverted contrary to its design, not only when men are unjust, or intemperate, or licentious in their use of it; but when their hearts are withdrawn by it from God: when they are made to "trust in uncertain riches," to neglect the care of their souls by "minding earthly things." This, my brethren, which I have just given to you, is St. Paul's own account of Christian moderation; and the reason he subjoins for it is that, "the fashion of this world passeth away." But let me further observe, that where it is said in my text, "Let your moderation be known unto all men," certainly it does not mean,—be moderate from ostentation, and that men may admire this virtue in you; that would

show an excessive regard to the opinions of men: but let Christians be conspicuous for their moderation. Let it far exceed the moderation of all who are not under the influence of Christian principles. "Let it be known unto all men." It is objected to what has been now taught, that by complying with it men would render themselves singular. We willingly grant it. In a certain sense they must be singular, if they are consistent Christians: "not conformed to this world." For this very end, "our Saviour Jesus Christ gave himself for us, to purify us unto himself, a *peculiar* people:" peculiar, not for singularities so trifling as those of speech or of dress; not for merely affected singularities, which the world will readily pardon where its spirit is countenanced in other more important respects; but for this, that they are "strangers and pilgrims upon earth:" men whose conduct bespeaks that they "look not at the things which are seen and are temporal, but at the things which are not seen, and are eternal:" That they thus judge, that if "one died for all, then were all dead, and that he died for all, that they which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." Singular for this, that the rule of their life is so different from that of all other men. "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all" in the name of the Lord

Jesus Christ," "to the glory of God." The text supposes that the world should notice and be surprised at our moderation; and if in such an age and country as this, the moderation of our desires and pursuits of the world particularly, rise not above what may be called the *standard* moderation, of even professed Christians, we may be assured it falls much below what the word of God requires of us.

II. But we proceed to speak more particularly of THE REASON GIVEN BY THE APOSTLE, FOR THAT MODERATION WHICH HE ENJOINS US.

If Christianity is extraordinary in her precepts, she is not wanting in motives fully proportioned to them. If she commands hard duties, she urges strong reasons, and engages also for competent assistance.

"Let your moderation be known unto all men," saith the apostle: "the Lord is at hand." The sentence is concise, but it is energy itself. If there is any spark of divine life in the heart, any portion of living faith, any fear of God, any love of Christ, any impressions of judgment and eternity,—this reason must call them into action. All men know that they are mortal; all who call themselves Christians, declare that "the Judge standeth before the door:" and he who is a Christian indeed, feels these things. The important truth has sunk

deep into his heart. It has produced an abiding effect upon the temper and feelings of his mind: so as to make it the great object of his pursuit, "to stand" when the Judge appeareth. He habitually "looketh for,"—if he is not always "hastening unto,—the coming of the day of God. Wherein the heavens shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat." Touch, therefore, upon this principle—say to him, "The Lord is at hand,"—and you give him a reason which enters into his very soul, why he should omit a thousand embarrassing, and to him, unnecessary engagements; and forego a thousand frivolous amusements, and perform a thousand laborious duties, which are neglected or attended to by others as inclination dictates. He is not only moved by fear in this, but at once also by the love of his duty, the love of his Lord, and the longing —sometimes the exulting—hope of hearing from him those words of unknown delight. "Well done, good and faithful servant." He not only hears with trembling the doom of the slothful and wicked servant, but his heart beats with the divine ambition (if I may be allowed the term) which it is the tendency of that question to excite, by which our Lord replied to Peter, when he asked whether all, or only some were commanded to watch; "Who then, is that faithful and wise steward

whom his Lord shall make ruler over his household?" "He looks not at temporal things, but at eternal things;" This it is to be a consistent Christian. The best Christian indeed knows that the impressions of eternity, are too apt to fade from his mind, by his intercourse with the world. But he is habitually guarding against this, as no other man is; and that distinguishes his character. Other men are dead to the force of these motives: they habitually feel them not: they are not practically influenced by them. But the true Christian is affected by them. They prevail with him: they habitually govern him: they form his character. With him, time is on the whole subordinate—decidedly subordinate—to eternity. Try yourselves, brethren, by this rule. Has God or the world, time or eternity, your heart? What answer doth your conduct give? Are you "walking by faith and not by sight?" You are so if you are true Christians.

But to apply the Apostle's reasoning more directly to enforce the particular duty which he here urges by it.

The consideration that "the Lord is at hand," suggests two ideas enforcing moderation respecting all worldly objects: 1. That they are comparatively unimportant to us: 2. That we are in danger from them; that they may unfit us for the coming of our Lord.

I will not insist at any length upon the first consideration, because it is so obvious.

Every one knows—O that all would but duly consider—the shortness and uncertainty of life: the certainty, the nearness of death and judgment; the immensity of eternity! O how vain when once viewed by the side of eternity—how vain are more than half the pursuits, the cares, the contentions, which agitate the world, and banish moderation from the minds of men! What do they appear to a man who looks down upon them from his death-bed? What will your cares and pleasures, brethren, appear, when you look back upon them from the verge of the grave? What, if for them you have neglected God and lost your souls?

And of this, let me tell you, there is no small danger. We speak not of those multitudes, whom the cares and pleasures of the world render utterly thoughtless of God, and regardless of religion—but of those who from time to time, perhaps for years, have felt convictions of their duty, have felt for a moment the worth of their souls, and the necessity of being truly religious—but yet, alas! continue what they were. Perhaps many of you are in this condition. Perhaps you have lost your convictions, or at best feel but temporary and ineffectual awakenings, which have never yet made you decided, which have left you but hovering

around the borders of duty and of safety; now seeming to approach, and presently carried off as far from it as ever. O! unhappy men, what is it which has thus infatuated you? The world! To you I appeal for the dangers of the world; the danger of loving it, the danger of fearing it; for the necessity of moderation. I beseech you, stand no longer in this doubtful, this perilous case. "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve." If the Lord be God, follow him: if the world can save your soul, why then we consent that you follow it. But ye cannot serve them both. Your situation I say is perilous. You have been spared like the barren fig-tree: and year after year your Lord hath come seeking fruit from you, and finding none. Beware—"the Lord is at hand!" Beware of the solemn word, "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?" or of that, if possible, still more awful word, "No fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever!"

But such are not the only persons who shew that the world is dangerous. Are there none concerning whom it is our hope, that "some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel, is found in them," who yet are grievously injured in their spiritual interests, by their immoderate pursuit of the world? They bring little fruit to perfection. They do little honour to the Gospel. They enjoy

little comfort themselves. They scarcely know,—such is the indecision of their character,—whether they are in the way to heaven or to hell.

O my friends, remember, "that the Lord is at hand!" You attribute your doubts and uncertainties, perhaps, to your want of faith: and so you may do, but in a different sense from that which you intend. You want that faith of the solemn truths now suggested to you, which should give them the due influence upon your conduct, and thus by making your character more decided, should make your state less doubtful. Should not this consideration rouse you to another course of action. What if he should now appear? Are ye ready to meet him? Or would not the approach of death throw you into disorder and dismay? And ought a Christian thus to live at uncertainties?

Some persons perhaps once knew a better state of mind, with regard to their spiritual concerns, than they are now conscious of. Perhaps it was when they were in a lower condition in the world than at present. They have grown in wealth, but they have declined in religion. Your friends congratulate your success. You are almost seduced to congratulate yourselves upon it. You are tempted to regard your advancement with pleasure. But think you, that angels who rejoiced over your conversion to God, if indeed you be

converted, rejoice with you now? Think you, that you are better prepared for the coming of the Lord? O repent, and do your first works: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

But all Christians, as far as they transgress the strict bounds of Christian moderation, will find themselves sore let and hindered in their heavenly course, and in their preparation for the coming of their Lord, by the cares and concerns of this life. These will too much occupy their thoughts, they will too much engage their hearts: they will swallow up their time and attention, they will exhaust all the spirit of their prayers and their religion. Observe therefore our Lord's direction—"Watch ye, and pray always," remembering "that the Lord is at hand." And thus amidst the din and bustle of life, be sobered by the still small voice which whispers to you, "The fashion of this world passeth away."

Regard I say again the expression of your Lord, "Watch ye and pray always." There are persons who not being themselves very deeply engaged in the business of the world, or anxious about amassing wealth, may think this subject well applies to many around them, and feel it not themselves. But remember, we are to be moderate in our recreations of every kind, as well as our business. We are no more to lead an indolent, trifling, self-

indulgent, useless life, than a covetous or ambitious one. And by whatever we are hindered,—whether by company or conversation, (even religious conversation,) or by business—from reading the Scriptures and self-examination, or from watching and warring against sin, or from abounding in the work of the Lord ;—the yielding to such hindrance is consistent with the belief that the Lord is at hand.

Now, if any persons should be impressed with the necessity of greater diligence and decision in religion, than they have hitherto practised; oh that they would make it their care to cherish that impression: that they would retire and meditate on the things which they have heard, and pray over them, and that without delay. Begin this day a better course. Let not religious persons grieve the Holy Spirit, by suffering such impressions to die away, or to be erased by the cares of the succeeding week. Let them carry with them the thought, "the Lord is at hand." Let all remember who have felt such impressions, and are now suffering them to fade from their minds, that by whatever artifices they may be able to impose upon themselves, their conscience and judgment are decidedly on the side of truth: they cannot neglect the admonition of the text, without self-condemnation and reproach.

Let not all which has been urged be rendered ineffectual, by some lurking, self-flattering, self-deluding expectation, that the Lord is not at hand to you: that you have many years to live. Alas! what are years? What is it that man calls *many* years? What security have you of one year? Is it that you are young? But the young die. Is it that you are healthy? But the healthy are cut off. Is it that you are engaged in useful and important employments? It is well if you are: but useful and important employments avert not the hand of death. Consider what I say, and let every rising objection to the duty enjoined be quelled by a moment's reflection on the question, "What is a man profited if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

SERMON XV.

1 CORINTHIANS xi. 31.

FOR IF WE WOULD JUDGE OURSELVES, WE SHOULD NOT BE JUDGED.

COUNSEL is in these words given to religiously disposed persons concerning their faults and sins. There is indeed in the true Christian believer's obedience, an entireness and universality which excludes the *allowed* or *habitual* commission of any known sin whatever: but "there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not." The conduct of the Christian with respect to these his faults and offences is very important: for if he judge not himself for them, then though he may not be "condemned with the world," yet will he be "judged and chastened of the Lord."

The abuses which had crept into the Corinthian church with respect to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, were the occasion of the Apostle's introducing these remarks. The church and worship of

God had come to be so far "despised" among them, that that holy ordinance was turned into a common, and sometimes it would seem, an intemperate meal.

For this misconduct they were visited with the divine judgments. "For this cause," saith the Apostle, "many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." He therefore recommends to them self-examination and a judging of themselves, in order that they might escape or avert such judgments of God.

I shall first shew what it is to JUDGE OURSELVES, and what to be JUDGED OF THE LORD: and then point out the CONNEXION BETWEEN JUDGING OURSELVES, AND ESCAPING THE JUDGMENT OF THE LORD.

I. What it is to JUDGE OURSELVES, and what to be JUDGED OF THE LORD.

I have shewn that the expression has reference to our faults: it means that we should not allow ourselves to go on quietly and contentedly in them, even in such as might appear small: that we must by no means suffer ourselves to regard them as unavoidable infirmities: that we should not merely be careful to guard against the repetition of them, but that there is a certain account and after-notice to be taken of them: we are to bring ourselves into judgment for them.

Two or three steps of this process may be noticed.

1. We should carefully *examine* our conduct and behaviour on all occasions. The importance of this practice was felt even by certain heathen philosophers, who accordingly made it one of the rules which they delivered to their disciples, never to suffer their eyes to be closed in sleep till they had thrice reviewed and scrutinized their conduct through the day. We can hardly train our children to a more important practice: we can hardly adopt a more important one ourselves. Unless we are continually "looking to ourselves," and considering, not only beforehand what we ought to do, but afterwards what we have done, and how far we have done right, and by what motives also we have been actuated, we shall find the affairs of our souls gradually and imperceptibly, yet certainly declining. We shall be going astray while we "know it not." To prevent this, we must "think upon our ways," that we "turn our feet to God's testimonies."

There is a sort of *constant* and *habitual* self-examination, to which "the fear of God" will lead us, and which is much to be cultivated. When the mind after acting, presently turns inwards upon itself to see what it has done, and how it has performed it. This should be extended

to every part, even the most minute, of our conduct: to our devotions, our conversation, and above all our thoughts: that we may learn to be "in the fear of the Lord all the day long." So far from this being irksome and unpleasant to the sincere Christian, he will find his happiness commonly proportioned to the degree in which he is enabled to practise it.

But besides this, it is important to adopt a more set examination at certain times, and on particular occasions. At the close of a day, the conduct of that day; at the close of a week, the conduct of that week; at the return of the sacramental day, our conduct and state of mind since the last communion, may with much advantage be reviewed. Particularly if for any time we have found our souls in an unprosperous state as to religion, (for this we shall afterwards see may be one effect of the judgment of God against us,) or if we have reason to fear that we have not acted altogether rightly in any matter of moment, then is an occasion which calls for strict and special self-examination and prayer, that we may discover what in us may have offended our God.

2. Then in the next place after the discovery of our faults, follows (as the second step of judging ourselves) *humiliation* for them. Having honestly searched them out, we are ingenuously and humbly

to confess them to Almighty God. We must reflect upon them, and upon the circumstances by which their guilt is aggravated, till our hearts are suitably affected and abased by the sense of them, till we are brought to real contrition and humiliation, till our conscience can be healed by nothing short of renewed and earnest application to the blood of atonement.

3. This, when sincere and genuine, will in the last place, put us much upon our *guard against the repetition* of the evils of which we repent. But without the course which has been prescribed, the mind will gradually relax into a state of settled negligence and sloth, in which it can make but the most feeble efforts against sin; even if it sink not altogether under its power: and this will infallibly expose us to the judgment of the Lord. What this is, is next to be explained.

By being judged of the Lord, we are not in this place to understand our being called to account at the last day: but something previous to that, something by which we may (if we refuse not to improve it aright) be preserved from condemnation in the day of final judgment. This appears from the next verse, "But *being judged*, we are *chastened* of the Lord, that we may *not be condemned* with the world." The consequence therefore of this judgment is temporary chastisement, for the prevention of final condemnation: and what this

chastisement was in the case of the Corinthians, the Apostle informs us: "many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep;" that is, are cut off by death.

If the children of God walk negligently and commit sin, their heavenly Father will not leave them uncorrected: he will "visit their offences with a rod, and their sin with scourges, though his loving-kindness he will not utterly take from them, nor suffer his truth to fail."

Temporal afflictions may be a means of this chastisement. We are never to view them, of whatever kind they be, as "springing out of the dust," or coming by chance, or of necessity, but as proceeding from the hand of God, and among the different reasons for which he inflicts them, this is one of the most common "to bring our sins to remembrance," and to produce repentance in us. Times of affliction therefore should always be made times of self-examination, and humiliation, and holy resolution against sin, formed in dependence on divine grace.

But an *unprosperous state of soul*, when the affections "cleave to the dust," instead of rising heavenwards, when the Scriptures become a dead letter, private prayer an almost lifeless form, and the ordinances of God lose their relish, may still more certainly be regarded as proceeding from the

judgment and chastisement of God, and will be esteemed by the true Christian a much more mournful affliction than sickness of the body. The holy Spirit is then grieved, and withdraws his influences; and darkness, and misery, and the prevalence of sin must be the consequence, except his favour be again recovered. The love of God may not be utterly "taken away," but it is hidden by a frown: and *he* can be no true child of God who can be content till this frown is changed again into a gracious smile, and "the light of God's countenance" again "lifted up" upon the soul.

A state of mind like that now referred to, is described in the Thirty-second Psalm. "When I kept silence" saith the psalmist—that is, neglected to judge myself, and to humble myself before God, and confess my sins; "when I kept silence my bones waxed old; through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture was turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid: I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." When he judged himself, he ceased to be judged of the Lord.

II. We proceed then, secondly, to show the CONNEXION BETWEEN JUDGING OURSELVES, AND

ESCAPING THE JUDGMENT AND CHASTISEMENT OF THE LORD: "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged."

And first, the neglect of judging ourselves for our faults, as has been described, is a great evil, and would lead to all other evils, were it permitted to proceed according to its tendency. But this our merciful heavenly Father will not suffer to be the case with regard to the children of his love. Having redeemed them to himself to purify them from all iniquity, he will not suffer them to fall under its power again, without using means to preserve them. And for this purpose he applies the judgment and chastisement of which we speak.

But especially the connexion between "judging ourselves," and "not being judged of the Lord," appears from considering what is the design of this judgment of the Lord. It is in fact to answer the same design as our judgment of ourselves should have answered;—namely, to humble us and guard us against our sins: indeed, it is to answer the design of that self-judgment, by bringing us to exercise it, as we ought to do. Such will be its natural tendency when the mind is under the power of Christian principles: so it wrought with David in the Psalm referred to above. When God's hand lay heavy upon him, it brought him to "acknowledge his sin" and seek forgiveness.

Did it not operate in this manner, the judgment and chastisement of the Lord could not at all answer the end ascribed to it by the Apostle, in saving us from being "condemned with the world;" for we can be saved from that doom, only by being brought to repentance. There is no greater mistake therefore, than to suppose that afflictions will of themselves save us from condemnation, without regard to their *effects* upon us. They can only be instrumental to it by being the means of bringing us to repentance; and if they do not produce that effect, they will not benefit us, but aggravate our guilt and condemnation.

The sins of the true Christian must condemn and even ruin him, could he be left to continue impenitent: but, by one means or other, whoever "is not to be condemned with the world," shall be brought to that self-judgment, repentance, and faith in Christ to which the world is a stranger: and the judgment and chastening of the Lord is the means of effecting this with which we are at present concerned.

Let me then make some application and improvement of the subject.

And have we not reason to apprehend that this duty of judging ourselves is much neglected, not

only by the irreligious world, but by persons "professing godliness?"

For the common daily failings of good people, that habitual daily self-examination of which we first spoke may be sufficient. But do we not frequently observe still greater evils than these in hopeful characters: nay, we all, I apprehend, at one time or other are guilty of sins which may by no means be said to be entirely *sins of infirmity*. Whenever this is the case, more particular examination of our consciences, and humiliation before God, are called for.

I will specify a few particular evils which I take to be not uncommon in religiously disposed persons, and will press it upon you to use this self-judgment respecting them.

1. And I would notice *evil tempers*. By that word I would be understood to mean not only anger, passion, and resentment, but also pride in all its workings,—whether of haughtiness in a superior, or of insubordination and self-will in an inferior—discontent, envy of those who appear more prosperous than ourselves, an unforgiving spirit, selfishness, and the want of benevolence, mercy, and tenderness, to others;—whatever, in short, is contrary to the love of God and man. Now it is much, and I fear, justly complained, that there is great want of right tempers in many who have "a

zeal for God." Servants complain of masters, and masters of servants; the poor complain of the rich, and the rich of the poor; governors of those who are governed, and those who are governed of their rulers. Some perhaps may be conscious of being very much subject to one evil temper or other. Do we then judge ourselves for this as we ought? Do we not merely utter a vain wish, or make, in the hour of remorse, some acknowledgement of our fault: but do we set ourselves to search it out, to think of its heinousness, and in the strength of God to overcome it? If not, we may at best expect to be judged for it of the Lord, even if we are not such characters as to "be condemned with the world." Whether we are or not such characters, must become doubtful in proportion to the prevalence of our besetting sins, and our neglect of this self-judgment for them.

2. *Worldly-mindedness* and *covetousness*. These are evils which are very prevalent, and especially in places of great business and commerce, and evils which it is to be feared eat out the life and spirit of religion in very many cases. They are plausible evils, and impose themselves under very fair appearances, and have many specious arguments to urge in their own defence. Also they are not easily defined: it is not easy to say where that which is right ends, and that

which is wrong begins. It is not, however, difficult to see that great worldliness now corrupts the church; and that many grievously deceive themselves, and, it is much to be apprehended, will ruin their souls by it. Not he only is guilty of "covetousness, which is idolatry," whose great care it is to be daily adding to his hoard,—already perhaps unnecessarily great,—but every one with whom it is the prime object to prosper in this world, and to do well to himself in this life, but who cares little about being rich towards God: nay, whoever has his heart so much engaged in worldly concerns whether great or small, as may make him postpone to them the care of his soul.

On this subject therefore, it behoves us very strongly to admonish Christians that they judge and examine themselves. Without doing so, there can be no doubt that they will be ensnared.

3. Again, with regard to the *immediate duties and offices of religion*. The Christian cannot live without prayer, and meditation, and the word of God: and his conscience probably will not suffer him to omit all attention to them. But he will often find himself in great danger of losing the spirit and power of divine ordinances: and resting in the mere form. It is of much importance therefore, that we look to ourselves, concerning the *manner* in which we perform these duties,

especially the duties of the closet. If we find ourselves at any time to have become slack and negligent; if we find that indifference and lukewarmness have grown upon us;—then it is necessary that we judge ourselves in this matter; that we set out afresh, as it were, in our religious course, and earnestly entreat the grace of God to revive and quicken us, and lead us into true communion with him, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

These may serve as some specimens of the subjects to which our text is to be continually applied: and if we do not follow its counsel we may expect to be "judged of the Lord." A spirit of habitual and constant conscientiousness, fear of being wrong, and resorting for direction to the word of God and prayer, must be maintained.

What are the things of which, as individuals, we have to complain? Does the Providence of God seem to frown upon us, or do we want religious comfort and spirituality of affections? let us "search and try our ways." Have we not grieved the Spirit of God? has not some sin or negligence been indulged, till it has become in a degree established in our minds, because we did not early enough, or seriously enough, judge ourselves for it? And is not our present disquietude owing to the chastisement which follows our being "judged of the Lord?" If so, let us "bear his

indignation; let us receive his chastening submissively, in hope that it is given in order to preserve us from condemnation with the world; let us strive to profit by it; let us judge ourselves, acknowledge our transgression, and apply ourselves diligently to the neglected duty, and we shall soon find a happier state succeed. The Lord "will forgive the iniquity of our sin;" he will "compass us about with songs of deliverance."

What has hitherto been said, has been principally addressed to those who are not strangers, altogether, to serious and conscientious self-examination: but I cannot but fear there are many persons among us who *are* strangers to it; and, let me ask, do you know what it is seriously to inquire concerning everything you do or are about to do—what is the will of God in this matter? Perhaps the thought has never entered your mind, or at least has soon passed away. The consideration of the will of God is easily supplanted with you, by that of success in the world, or even of the opinion of men. Yet, perhaps, you go on and prosper. You are "not in trouble as other men:" nor meet with much chastening, though you think little of fearing God. Wherefore is this? Because God approves of you? No; there is no greater mistake than to think that we are in the favour of God because we pros-

per in the world. The reason why *you* succeed thus, while God chastises his offending children, it may be feared, is no other than that he leaves you "to be condemned with the world." Oh what an awful sentence is it! "To be condemned with the world!" The world therefore goeth into condemnation; and all who walk according to the course of it," must go along with it. O hear ye this and fear. O hearken, we beseech you, to "the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children," "Come out and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

Hear this, ye who are "of the world." Are there not many whose character it is that they are "of the world?" Their love of the world shews it. Their fear of the world shews it. They dare not come out from the world and be separate at the command of God; they dare not encounter the sneer of the world and the charge of singularity. Their agreement in sentiment, in principle, in pursuits, in practice, with the world at large, shews that they are "of the world:" and to be "of the world," is according to the Scriptures, to be "not of God." To be 'a man of the world,' is the language of commendation with many called Christians; to be

men of the world is, in the language of Scripture, to be no Christians. Ye then, who are of the world, and who shew it by possessing the spirit of the world, consider what is before you. The world goeth into condemnation, and all that belong to it will go with it: and into what condition? Into final, everlasting ruin. O take warning! "Flee from the wrath to come."

SERMON XVI.

JEREMIAH xxxi. 34.

AND THEY SHALL TEACH NO MORE EVERY MAN HIS NEIGHBOUR, AND EVERY MAN HIS BROTHER, SAYING, KNOW THE LORD: FOR THEY SHALL ALL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST OF THEM UNTO THE GREATEST OF THEM, SAITH THE LORD: FOR I WILL FORGIVE THEIR INIQUITY, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SIN NO MORE.

THE Prophet is here even avowedly speaking of the times of the gospel; predicting the new covenant to be made with the church through the Messiah, in the place of the old covenant made with Israel through Moses: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord; but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days,

saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." The blessings promised are precisely the great blessings of the gospel; regeneration, justification, adoption.—Regeneration; "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts."—Justification; "I will forgive their iniquity, and will remember their sin no more."—Adoption; "I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

This covenant indeed, as well as the former, is said to be made "with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah," and the gospel was first to be offered to the Jews; the preaching of "repentance and remission of sins in the name of Jesus Christ," was to "begin at Jerusalem;" and though that people, as a nation, rejected it, yet the time, we are assured, shall come, and we anticipate it with ardent expectation, when their "heart shall be turned to the Lord," and they shall enjoy a full share of the blessings which they have hitherto refused. Yet it is the glory of this

covenant, and it was predicted as such by the Jewish prophets themselves, that it belongs not exclusively to any one people, but makes us all alike "the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ." The Messiah was to be given for a covenant of the people, "a light to the Gentiles;" for "God's salvation to the ends of the earth."

Accordingly, this whole passage is quoted by the Apostle in the eighth chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, as descriptive of that "better covenant, established upon better promises," by which we draw nigh to God. And in the closing verse of the passage, (the verse of our text,) the holy prophet is carried forward to predict those full and universal effects, which all scripture, with united voice, declares shall ultimately result from this covenant. "They shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord."

Now it is one important feature of this prediction, that, while it declares what shall be *the privilege* of future times, it suggests what is the *duty* of present, and of all intervening times. The present duty is, "to teach every man his neighbour and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord." The future privilege, resulting from the

performance of the present duty, will be, that there shall no longer be any need to continue the service of teaching: "for all shall know the Lord, from the least unto the greatest."

These then are the two points which we will consider. THE DUTY OF THE PRESENT TIME: and, THE PRIVILEGE OF FUTURE TIMES.

I. THE DUTY OF THE PRESENT TIME, and of all times till the blessed period, promised in my text, shall arrive, is "to teach,"—to teach men religion, and earnestly to press it upon their regard, saying, "every man to his neighbour, and every man to his brother, Know the Lord."

"The knowledge of God," is frequently put in Scripture for the whole of religion: and hence it is considered as of the greatest possible importance. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Accordingly, it is promised as the greatest of blessings:—"Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." And it is spoken of as the only solid and sufficient ground of "glorying" or rejoicing. "Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the

Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord."

This "knowledge of God" then, implies just views of the Divine character and perfections, as opposed to the acknowledgment of false gods, and to all the erroneous notions of the true God, which have been prevalent in the world;—"That he knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth." It is the knowledge of God also, as revealed to us only in and through the Redeemer. To "know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Only through this medium, through a Mediator, a Redeemer, an Atonement, can sinners have any such knowledge of God, as can be salutary to them. Further, it is not a merely speculative, but a practical knowledge; it is attended with "the fear of the Lord." It is the knowledge also which results from the experience of his goodness, yea of his saving grace. "They shall know me, . . . for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." This is stated as the special ground and reason of their knowledge of God; the special character under which they should know God, as the God that "forgiveth iniquity, transgression, and sin." And where God is thus known, there love and gratitude

will "constrain us;" and that indispensable evidence of our possessing the right knowledge of God will be afforded, which obedience alone can supply. "Hereby do we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him; and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

Man indeed is to be the instrument of communicating this knowledge to his fellow-men; but a Divine influence alone can effectually open the heart for its reception. This may be considered as implied in the text; and in the twenty-fourth chapter (ver. 7.) the effect is most explicitly referred to that cause. "I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God; for they shall return unto me with their whole heart."

On the great importance of this knowledge of God, it is not necessary to add a single word, after the Scriptural authorities which have been adduced. It is the basis of all true religion, goodness, and righteousness; and consequently, of all true happiness, also, among men. But on the *need* which exists for all our endeavours to communicate it, much indeed might easily be said.

Alas! what a scene does the history of the world present! "Darkness hath covered the earth, and gross darkness the people." Where, almost

for ages, for even thousands of years, was the true God, even nominally worshipped? "When men knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves wise, (philosophers) they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. They changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature, more than the Creator, who is blessed for evermore." For ages after ages, this was universally the case, save only in the little and despised country of Judea, and through the greater part of the world, it continues the same to this day. In all other kinds of knowledge and wisdom the ancient world made admirable progress; but they made none in the knowledge of God. Even at Athens, 'the eye of Greece,' and by consequence, the eye of the world, the true God was "the unknown God." And the result of all this estrangement from God was, and still is. every sort of crime and every sort of misery. "Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient."

But what has been the case even among God's

professed people, within his visible church? Look to the Jews of old, ever prone "to change their glory" for "lies, vanity, and that which could not profit:" and even after they had long renounced their idolatries, and become zealous against them, what did our Lord say to them, with reference to that practical and influential knowledge of God, of which we speak? "Ye say that he is your God, yet ye have not known him." And did not all their conduct support the charge? They "kept not his commandments," and him whom the Father sent, they rejected. They demonstrated therefore, that they had not "the knowledge of God."

Look again to the Christian church, and see the knowledge of God, for a long series of ages, lost and buried beneath a dark and shapeless mass of superstitions and human inventions.

But let us turn to Britain—highly favoured, pre-eminently distinguished as it is—does the knowledge of God abound even here? Blessed be God, he hath made himself known to us, he hath "given his statutes and his ordinances unto us," as he hath done to no other nation under heaven. Yet to what multitudes, to how great a majority, may we fear, of us, might it be said, as to the Jews, Ye have not known God! How is the true doctrine of Christ corrupted, perverted,

disregarded, lost, among thousands,—I fear I may say, among millions—of our population! How few comparatively are influenced by the principles of the religion they profess to have received! How few live in the faith, and fear, and love, and service of God, and our blessed Saviour!

This want of proper knowledge of God, and of due regard to him, is to every pious mind, the most painful subject of reflection, that the world can present. "For lack of" this "knowledge, the people perish." The pain which arises from the contemplation of the fact, is a principal thing which makes the Christian long for a better world, and disposes him often to exclaim with the Psalmist, "O that I had wings like a dove, then would I fly away and be at rest!" or with Jeremiah, "O that I had in the wilderness a lodging-place of way-faring men, that I might leave my people and go from them, . . . for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, saith the Lord." This made St. Paul protest that "he had great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart, for his brethren, his kinsmen, according to the flesh." This also constrained our blessed Lord himself to "weep" over Jerusalem, saying, "Oh that thou hadst known, even thou at least in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes."

The need, then, which exists for teaching men "the knowledge of God," being so great, the obligation to do so, cannot be doubtful. St. Paul's "spirit was stirred within him" at Athens, when he saw that polite and learned city, "wholly given to idolatry:" "therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and in the market daily with them that resorted thither." And somewhat of the same impression, methinks, should be made upon our minds when we see so many persons, who, whatever else they may be, appear to be destitute of true practical religion; strangers to, or uninfluenced by, those things which belong to their everlasting peace. Zeal for God, should move us: to see him so neglected, forgotten, dishonoured in the world, which he hath made and continually sustains. Love and compassion to the souls of men should move us. And if, in our attempts to awaken, enlighten, and convert them, we should subject ourselves sometimes to be reproached as St. Paul was, as "babblers," or "beside ourselves," we may one day take more satisfaction in the reproach, than we shall do from our customary lukewarmness, timidity, and reserve. Finally, the example of Christ, and his declared design in communicating saving knowledge to *ourselves*, should move us. He is prophetically introduced as saying, "I

have not hid thy righteousness within my heart, I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest." And how well this agrees to his practice, we must all be sensible. He was ever teaching men the knowledge of God and of salvation, whether it was to multitudes in the synagogue, or on the sea shore; or to a solitary individual as he passed by the way. And as, "while he was in the world," he was thus the "light of the world," so he hath taught all his disciples that they are to be subordinate luminaries; deriving their light from him, and reflecting it to others, they are to "let their light so shine before men," both by their "good works," and also by "holding forth the word of life," that men may glorify God by their means. "No man," said he, "lighteth a candle, and putteth it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that it may give light to all that are in the house." If God has enlightened us, it is that we should be the means of enlightening others: and if we keep what we have learnt to ourselves, we are guilty of such a breach of trust, in not applying the deposit to the purposes for which it was committed, as may even cause it to be withdrawn from us. The duty is thus, by implication at least, extended to every individual who possesses the knowledge of God. "Every man should teach his neighbour,

and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord." And our Lord has taught us to consider every man as a neighbour and a brother, to whom we have the opportunity of doing good: and it is the privilege of the present time to have that opportunity afforded us, even with respect to the most distant regions of the world.

Thus to teach others to "know the Lord," is by no means exclusively the work of ministers. The parent is to teach his children, and the master his servants: and he must do it, if he would not have "their blood required at his hands." The rich are to teach their poorer neighbours, and the elder the younger, and persons who have leisure, to improve their time in schools, and in cottages, and in every way for this purpose. Yea, we should aim to say to all with whom we come in contact, "Know the Lord;" to lead, to draw, to allure them, to the knowledge, and love, and service of God. We should be unwilling that persons should pass any time in our company, in a journey, for example, or any other way, without hearing something from us that may tend to do them good and promote their salvation.

Is it indeed true that every man we meet, though a dying, is yet an immortal creature? that every one is a sinner hastening to the bar of God, and so to heaven or to hell, and that most men are ignorant

and unconcerned respecting the things which belong to their peace? And should we not be anxious to instruct them, and excite them to serious attention? Has Almighty God, of his infinite goodness, given us "the knowledge of salvation through the remission of sins;" and shall we refuse to communicate that knowledge to others also, that they "may have fellowship with us?" Forbid it duty! forbid it charity! forbid it humanity! forbid it all that "faith which worketh by love!" "A word spoken in due season, how good is it!" God may clothe the simplest word spoken in faith and love, with power to "minister grace unto the hearers," and to "make them wise unto salvation." "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand, for thou canst not tell which shall prosper,—this or that,—or whether both shall be alike good."

But after all, this Christian duty, though a blessed one, when performed with fidelity and success, is yet often felt to be trying, discouraging, and attended with many sacrifices: and above all, the causes which demand its performance, are painful in the extreme to the pious and benevolent mind. How delightful then to such a mind to look forward to an altered state of things, even here upon earth, which shall make this service no longer to be called for, in any such sense as it now

is, because it shall be no longer needed; when that which was proposed in rendering it shall be generally, or even universally attained, and "all shall know the Lord from the least unto the greatest."

II. This is to be the PRIVILEGE OF FUTURE TIMES which we proceed to contemplate.

The universal voice of prophecy then, we observe, conspires to assure us, that the state of the world, with regard to religion and righteousness, shall eventually become widely different from what we have ever hitherto seen it. The gospel of Christ has already produced great, and glorious, and wide-extended changes, in the moral condition of mankind; but what it has hitherto wrought, we may confidently conclude is little, compared with what it shall be the means of effecting. "The kingdom of heaven," has indeed been long set up among men, and unnumbered millions have found it the kingdom of "righteousness and peace:" but oh! how much remains to be done ere that prayer shall be fully answered, "Thy kingdom come! Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven!" The Divine Redeemer has indeed received no scanty measure of that "joy set before him," for the sake of which he "endured the cross, despising the shame;" he has "seen of the travail of his soul," in the salvation of "a great multitude which no

man can number;" and with respect to every individual of this multitude he is "satisfied." But small, we may confidently conclude, is the reward which his great sacrifice has yet received, compared with that with which it shall be eventually crowned.

The sacred Scriptures in different parts, and from the pens of different inspired writers, present us with various series, (as I may call them,) of prophecies, stretching forward from the times in which they were delivered, into remote ages, and even to the consummation of all things, when the "mystery of God" in this lower world, "shall be finished;" and what particularly strikes us in contemplating them, is, that however various may be intervening events which they predict, they all issue in one conclusion; they all conspire to declare that "in the eventide it shall be light,"—that the "glory of the Lord shall" at length "be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together."

A small number of such detached promises and predictions, are all which I must call to your recollection, to animate you, my Christian brethren, in your faith, your hope, your prayers, and your labours of love.

Remember then the constant promise made to the father of the faithful. "I will bless thee, and thou shalt be a blessing; and in thy seed shall all

the nations of the earth be blessed:" now "that seed was Christ."

Turn to the book of Psalms. Read the twenty-second Psalm, which so graphically describes beforehand, the "sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." What is there promised and anticipated, as the fruit of the Redeemer's sufferings? "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord, and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee."

Again, observe how the seventy-second Psalm predicts the kingdom and glory of the Messiah. "He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. The kings of Tarshish, and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him. . . . His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun, . . . and all nations shall call him blessed."

Isaiah treats largely and frequently upon this delightful theme. Very near the opening of his prophecies, in the second chapter, he proclaims, "It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house, (his church,) shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations

shall flow unto it." And as the consequence, he adds, " They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

Then, as it is again promised, the days of the church's " mourning shall be ended: " the " people also shall be all righteous: " a " little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation; " " the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be seven-fold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound." " I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of man came in the clouds of heaven, . . . and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." " The kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him."

Turn to the New Testament. It bears less of a prophetic character than the Old.

The eleventh chapter of Romans presents us with some most sublime and delightful views of the divine dispensations, in some parts stretching forward into remote futurity. It relates especially to the Jews—their rejection and their future re-admission into the church. Their fall was "the riches of the world," as it gave occasion to the communication of the gospel to the gentiles: and it is demanded, "how much more" shall their "fulness" prove rich in blessings. "And if the casting away of them, were the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them again be but "life from the dead?" "The fulness of the gentiles shall come in, and all Israel shall be saved."

And most extraordinary are the views which are presented in the book of Revelation, of the history of the Christian church, ending in assurances of the final triumph of the cause of Christ. The eleventh chapter presenting, as it would seem, a summary of what was afterwards to be enlarged upon,—proclaims, "And the seventh angel sounded, and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever." And in the twentieth chapter, we have this remarkable vision: "I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit, and a great chain in his

hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years shall be fulfilled:" it is added,—"After that, he must be loosed a little season." But this subject we leave, nor would we even attempt to pry into the particulars of unfulfilled prophecy. It seems unwise, and even dangerous, to do so. Some general features we may trace, suited to raise our hopes and expectations, and to call forth our prayers and our endeavours. Such an one especially is that grand feature to which alone I have directed your attention, that Scripture prophecies and promises all assure us of the approach of times, such as this fallen world has never yet seen; when he who is styled "the god, and the prince of the world," and who is declared to have deceived "the whole world," "shall deceive the nations no more," but when "all shall know the Lord, from the least unto the greatest:" when "the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the earth as the waters cover the sea." "Thus heavenward all things tend!" "And these things are written, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope;" and "that he that soweth in hope, might be partaker of his hope."

In conclusion, let me first press upon you the inquiry, Do you yourselves "know the Lord?" So know him, as to fear him, to love him, to serve him? know him in Jesus Christ? know him, as the God that "pardoneth your iniquities and remembereth your sin no more?" Till we know God ourselves, not only are we utterly unqualified to fulfil our duty to others by saying to them, "Know the Lord;" but we are strangers to that which is to lead us to eternal life. O then seek it to-day while it is called to-day, not only for your neighbour's sake, your children's sake, but for your souls' sake. "Acquaint now yourselves with God, and be at peace:" "Seek it and you shall find it."

Secondly; If you have found the knowledge of God yourselves, Oh, think of your obligations; and then say; are you discharging your duties to others? Are you saying to others, "know the Lord?" "Come ye, and let us go up to the house of the Lord, and he will teach us of his way, and we will walk in his paths."

Thirdly; If thus discharging the duty of the present time, comfort yourselves with the prospect of the future: and though you see it not on earth, you shall look down upon it from heaven, and rejoice in having contributed to it. The happiness of the future time is to result from the duty of

the present time—as the harvest from the seed-time. "And he that now goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

SERMON XVII.

ISAIAH XXIX. 18, 19.

AND IN THAT DAY SHALL THE DEAF HEAR THE WORDS OF THE BOOK, AND THE EYES OF THE BLIND SHALL SEE OUT OF OBSCURITY, AND OUT OF DARKNESS. THE MEEK ALSO SHALL INCREASE THEIR JOY IN THE LORD, AND THE POOR AMONG MEN SHALL REJOICE IN THE HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL.

It is in the midst of an extensive series of prophecy that these words occur; and the part in which they occur, appears to refer to the times of our blessed Lord, and the events which immediately followed his death and passion, his resurrection and ascension into heaven for us. He himself applies to the Jews of his time the words of the thirteenth verse: "This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear towards me is taught by the precept of men." Hence they rejected and crucified the Saviour, who disappointed their carnal hopes,

exposed their errors, and reproved their sins. And accordingly, as the next verse denounces, God "proceeded to do a marvellous work and a wonder among his people." "The wisdom of their wise men perished, and the understanding of their prudent men was hid." God cast off his ancient people the Jews, and "called his servants by another name"—adopting the Christian church in the stead of the Jewish. Then, as immediately preceeds the text, the wilds of "Lebanon," which might be taken as an emblem of the Gentile world, were "turned into a fruitful field," and the once "fruitful field" of the house of Israel "was esteemed as a forest."

We shall see then at once, how, especially in the events that accompanied and followed the day of Pentecost, the promises of the text were fulfilled: how multitudes that had been spiritually "deaf and blind," "heard the words of the book, and saw out of obscurity, and out of darkness:" how "the meek" also "increased their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men rejoiced in the Holy One of Israel."

But, though the prophetical reference of the passage appears to be directly to that period, and to those events, yet the blessings described are no other than those which always take place, where the gospel comes accompanied with "the Holy

Ghost sent down from heaven." They are blessings, I trust, not unknown among ourselves. May God increase the instances and the measure, in which they are enjoyed, a thousand fold! While we now consider them, may those who have hitherto been "deaf," so hear that their "souls may live!" May those who have hitherto been "blind," now see "the light of life!" May "the meek,"—the humble,—"increase their joy in the Lord!" and "the poor in spirit,"—the "broken and contrite in heart,"—be led to "rejoice in the Holy One of Israel," as become, through the intercession and sacrifice of Christ, their reconciled Father and Friend, and "their portion for ever!"

The blessings described appear to divide themselves into two classes, the former adapted to the case of persons now first coming to the knowledge of God; and the latter to those who have previously in some degree known, and loved, and served him. We will consider them under this two-fold division.

I. The COMMUNICATION OF THE RIGHT KNOWLEDGE OF GOD TO THOSE WHO HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN STRANGERS TO IT. "The deaf shall hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness."

This again may apply both to those who had never before enjoyed the means of knowledge, and to those who, possessing such means, had never before improved them aright.

At the time referred to, the whole Gentile world were almost destitute of the means of attaining the knowledge of God—of such means at least as fallen man has ever been found to improve for that purpose. "The invisible things of God," indeed, "even his eternal power and Godhead," were "shewn unto them in the things that were made"—in the works of creation: but they were "blind," they had not eyes to see them there: and of the light of direct revelation, such as clearly shines upon us, they were destitute: they were in "obscurity," yea, in utter "darkness." But now, by the preaching of the gospel, the light of divine truth shone upon them: "the Sun of Righteousness arose upon them, with healing in his beams." The very commission given to St. Paul was in these words: "To whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among all them that are sanctified by faith that is in me."

And, brethren, though this is not our case, though we are not in this sense in "darkness,"

yet millions of our fellow creatures still are so—destitute of the light of revelation—" sitting in darkness and the shadow of death"—" without Christ—having no hope, and without God in the world." Oh, may the time come when God shall visit them also in mercy, when he shall " send out his light and his truth"—" to guide their feet into the way of peace!" Let our prayers and our endeavours never be wanting to this end.

But, though " the true light now shineth" upon us, how often and to how many doth it yet " shine in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not." The book is opened—the book is read—the truth is preached to us: but how many are yet " deaf," so that they hear not " the words of eternal life;" they hear them not to their souls' health and salvation.

Oh, brethren, consider how the case is with yourselves individually. Has the gospel come to you " not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost," so that it hath " quickened you who were dead in trespasses and sins?" Has it " turned you from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God?"

Here it is promised, that those who have, perhaps, long been " deaf," shall " hear the words of the book;" that those who have, perhaps, long been " blind, shall see out of obscurity, yea even

out of darkness." Has this ever been the case with you? Have the sacred truths of holy scripture ever been presented to your minds in such a way as abidingly to impress and affect you, and to govern your conduct, so as they ought in all reason to do? Whereas you were "carnal," "minding earthly things," have you been made practically and abidingly to feel the vanity of the world, and the supreme importance of eternity? Whereas you were thinking highly of your virtues and slightly of your sins, have you been made sensible of your guilt and danger as offenders against God? Have you been led seriously to inquire, "What must I do to be saved?" Have you ever learnt properly to "behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world?" Have the great subjects of our redemption ever drawn your regard, and affected your hearts as they ought to do? Have you followed your Redeemer in devout contemplation to Gethsemane and Golgotha? Have you "looked on him whom *you* (by your sins) have pierced, and mourned" with that penitential sorrow which has led you to hate and forsake your sins? Have you looked to Him with the eye of faith, and sought to have your guilt washed away in his atoning blood? Have you found "peace with God" through him, and learned to love and serve the God from whose

service you were before averse? to ask, under the influence of devout love and gratitude, "What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits?" Has "the love of Christ," in dying for you, "constrained you to live no longer to yourselves, but to him who died for you and rose again?" Are you in consequence becoming "in Christ new creatures?" Are you now "setting your affections on things above," and learning to "rejoice in hope of the glory of God?"

Of this sort are the effects produced when "the deaf hear the words of the book," so as to understand and to feel them; when they who had been "blind see out of obscurity,"—are "called out of darkness into God's marvellous light."

I have said, that there are those among us who, I doubt not, know what this means, and can apply to their own case, and trace in the history of their own minds, many of the particulars of this description. But I no less doubt that there are many others who still need to have these effects produced upon them. 'O God, do thou open the blind eyes, unstop the deaf ears, and soften the (naturally) hard hearts of all who appear before thee in thy house of prayer!'

II. The second class of blessings promised in my text applies more particularly to those who

are already the SUBJECTS OF THE INFLUENCE OF DIVINE GRACE. "The meek shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy one of Israel."

The characters here described I take to be precisely those of our Lord's beatitudes, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The "poor in spirit" are often indeed found among the "poor in this world:" and then, like Lazarus, they are infinitely more happy than their most prosperous neighbours, who are of a different temper of mind. But yet "the poor in spirit," and the poor in this world's goods are not to be confounded together: they are not always the same persons. Many poor men are yet proud, and therefore far from righteousness, and from blessedness; and, thanks be to God, some rich men are yet humble men, and blessed among the "poor in spirit." But these latter, whatever be their circumstances in life, I take to be the characters spoken of in the text. Their association with the meek indicates it.

Now poverty of spirit consists in *feeling* our wants, our emptiness, our dependence upon God. It consists especially in feeling our guilt, and consequent need of God's pardoning mercy; our

weakness and depravity, and consequent need of God's renewing and strengthening grace.

'In my youth,' says one, 'I was for many years greatly discouraged, and at last almost in despair, from feeling the impossibility of bringing my earthly mind to prefer spiritual things; to love God better than the world. At length, I was reminded, that this great work, though impossible to me, was easy to Him; and that he had promised to do it for all who ask him. From that time my difficulties began to yield. I saw how absurd it was to doubt the promise of God; and that it was in respect of these very difficulties, that he says, "Seek, and ye shall find." So that I began to see with unspeakable joy, that the hardness, reluctance, and worldliness of my heart were no real obstacles, provided I did but apply to him for a cure. Yes, to cast ourselves entirely on God, to do all for us, in the diligent use of means, is the sure, the only way to obtain the benefit.'

Now, this was practically learning "poverty of spirit." Yes, the very language in which poverty of spirit expresses itself, the very breath by which it lives, if I may so speak, is prayer to God: its very essence is dependence upon God. If we are poor in spirit, we shall be 'compelled to pray by the voice of constant internal necessity.' Hereby let us try ourselves whether we have this

spirit, (which is pronounced blessed,) or not. Do we pray seldom, and only in form, not from the deep feeling of want, and from a hungering and thirsting after what God hath promised? Then we are not "poor in spirit."

A humble sense of our wants and our sins—an habitual dependance on God for blessings invaluable and most necessary, but utterly undeserved —will naturally diffuse an influence over the whole of our spirit and conduct towards our fellow creatures, as well as directly towards Almighty God. "The poor useth intreaties: but the rich answereth roughly." He that is daily coming to God through Jesus Christ our Lord for pardon and grace, will learn to forgive others, as God for Christ's sake forgiveth him? The consciousness of his own evils will make him proportionably patient, forbearing, and compassionate towards sinners generally. Hence "poverty of spirit," and "meekness," or mildness, submissiveness, contentment, humility and quietness of temper are closely connected together.

And these are the persons to whom blessings are promised in my text—"the meek" and "the poor in spirit"—the humble, the contrite, who, dependant on God's mercy themselves, are disposed to shew mercy to others. And to these it is promised that they shall "rejoice in the Holy One of

Israel," yea, that they shall "increase their joy in the Lord."

And why shall they rejoice in the Lord? Because in the gospel of Christ such discoveries are made of his character and perfections, and of his mind towards us, as meet all the wants and desires of the persons here described. They desire the pardon of their sins; and they behold God, in Christ, "faithful and just to forgive them their sins, and to cleanse them from all unrighteousness." They desire reconciliation with God; and "God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." They desire restoration to the Divine image, "in righteousness and true holiness:" and through Christ God promises his Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier, to every one that asketh him. They desire communion with God: and through Christ he giveth them, "not the spirit of bondage again to fear, but the spirit of adoption whereby they cry Abba Father." They desire the holy felicity of heaven: and to all of their character the Saviour saith, as to his Apostles of old, "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." May not their souls then well "magnify the Lord, and their spirits rejoice in God their Saviour?" Yes, each one of them may say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." "Christ Jesus is made of God unto

me wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption." "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

It is the design of Scripture, and of the gospel of Christ in particular, to lead men thus to rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ; not only to serve God, but to love him and rejoice in him. "Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again I say, rejoice." Joyous affections of this kind are not indeed to be substitutes for obedience, but they are the accompaniments and the spring of zealous and devoted obedience.

And as the meek, and the humble, and the poor in spirit, particularly need this consolation, and are especially prepared for it, so the Scriptures seem studiously to administer it to them. There is no one state of mind to which so much encouragement is given, both in the Old Testament and the New. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word." And, as you have heard, our Lord almost begins his

ministry with pronouncing, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: blessed are they that mourn: blessed are the meek: blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness." And so the design of his coming—the very nature of his commission—is described in a passage which he adopts and applies to himself: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted; to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." Yes, he will "not break the bruised reed; he will not quench the smoking flax."

Both the Old Testament and the New, hold out this language of encouragement to all repenting sinners: but the latter adds unspeakably to that encouragement by the display made of the divine character in the Lord Jesus Christ, "God manifest in the flesh;" in the inestimable love of God, thus manifested in giving his only begotten Son for us, "that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life:" and particularly in that through this medium it is shewn to us, how the divine justice and mercy are reconciled and brought to act together in beauteous harmony—in *what way* it is that "mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace em-

brace each other." The Old Testament indeed declared Jehovah to be "a just God," and yet a "Saviour;" but it was reserved for the New clearly to discover *how* this could be—how infinite justice should be satisfied, while boundless mercy was exercised—namely, through the sacrifice of the Son of God in our nature for us. God hath set Him forth to be a propitiation—that he might be just, and yet "the justifier of" the sinner "that believeth in Jesus." "*He* was made sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

How blessed and delightful a view then does the text give us of the designs, and of the effects of the gospel. Through it "the eyes of the spiritually blind are opened; the ears of the spiritually deaf are unstopped, and their feet directed into the way of peace; it strengthens the weak hands, and confirms the feeble knees;" it saith, "to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not;" to "the meek" it "increases joy in the Lord;" it teaches "the poor among men to rejoice in the Holy One of Israel;" yes, even in that holiness of the divine character, that abhorrence of sin, which before was the terror and distress of the mind.

All these effects it wrought in a glorious measure when it first went forth in the world; turning

men to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, even Jesus, their deliverer from the wrath to come. And these effects it still produces in its measure whenever it is truly received. And oh, how blessed are the effects! To see the mind that was hard, careless, worldly—regardless alike of divine threatenings and promises—that was "deaf" to admonition, and "blind" to its true interests: to see such a mind awakened, softened, humbled—listening to "the words of the Book"—"seeing out of obscurity and out of darkness"—discerning the truths of the Gospel, and embracing them in faith and love—quickened from death in trespasses and sins—"alive to God through Jesus Christ our Lord"—beginning to walk in "newness of life,"—going on "to rejoice in the Lord, to increase its joy in the Holy One of Israel:" "filled with joy and peace in believing, and abounding in all the fruits of righteousness which are through Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God:" and thus giving evidence that its end shall be everlasting life. How blessed a spectacle is this to every one that loves God, and loves his neighbour! May it frequently be presented to our eyes! May every minister of Christ have very many such proofs, that his labour is "not in vain in the Lord!" And may

the gospel indeed go forth "into all the world," and every where bring forth these happy fruits—till "the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose."

But, brethren, let it not content us to hear or read of such effects of the gospel on others: let us never rest without having them produced on ourselves. Are we conscious that hitherto our ears have been deaf to "the joyful sound" of the gospel, on which many around us set such value, and from which they profess to derive so great benefit? Have scriptural truths hitherto appeared to us involved, as it were, in mist, and confusion, and much "obscurity," so that we have regarded them as dark and doubtful, and have seen little or nothing of their glory? Have we never yet known what it was to find "joy in the Lord," and "to rejoice in the Holy One of Israel?" O let us no longer rest in that state! Blessings are close at hand to us, for the want of which we remain strangers to happiness, and without which we must shortly perish. O let us seek them! From this day forward let us resolve, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after." Let us so seek, and we shall assuredly find "the joy of God's salvation." Then we shall no longer rove through a barren world, "seeking rest and

finding none." We shall no longer be urging the endless inquiry, "Who will shew us any good?" we shall have found that which is good: and our only prayer shall still be, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us:" our thankful acknowledgment, "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and wine increased."

SERMON XVIII.

MALACHI III. 18.

THEN SHALL YE RETURN, AND DISCERN BETWEEN THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED; BETWEEN HIM THAT SERVETH GOD, AND HIM THAT SERVETH HIM NOT.

THIS chapter, which nearly closes the Old Testament, foretels the coming of the Saviour, but intimates that it would be attended with other effects than were expected. "The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple: behold he shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts, but who may abide the day of his coming, and who shall stand when he appeareth?" This was fulfilled when the Jews rejected their long-expected Messiah, and when, in consequence, "wrath came upon them to the uttermost." The times are spoken of as evil, but a righteous remnant would be found who would associate together, for mutual counsel and edification, and their conduct is marked with the peculiar approbation of heaven. "Then they that feared the Lord, spake often one to

another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name: and they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." They should be preserved and blessed when others were destroyed. And here my text is introduced, "Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked; between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not. Even those who had most overlooked the distinction should then be compelled to observe it." Even those who had judged most unfavourably of the servants of God, should then "return," review the whole case, and correct their erroneous judgments.

Three things are implied in these words: first, That there exists an essential difference in the characters of men: second, That this difference of character is not at present properly regarded, or marked by a corresponding difference of condition. But, third, that though not now thus marked, the time is coming when it shall be, so that none shall be able to overlook it. We shall speak of these three particulars.

I. THE ESSENTIAL DISTINCTION EXISTING IN THE CHARACTERS OF MEN.

This is marked in my text by a double description: "the righteous and the wicked," and "him that serveth God and him that serveth him not."

"The righteous" are upright characters; persons of principle; conscientious persons. They are anxious rather to be right in what they do, than to be at all events, successful: more desirous to secure the favour of God, than to enjoy the honour which cometh from man.

Though what distinguishes their character before men is the thing here chiefly spoken of, yet if it be asked what is the righteousness on which they rely for acceptance with God, the answer is, "They are accounted righteous before God only for the merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for their own works or deservings." And if the *source* of their personal righteousness, or holiness of life, be inquired into, it is no other than "the sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience." "The grace of God which bringeth salvation, hath taught them, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world."

"The wicked" are the characters opposite to

these. They may be profane, unjust, licentious, profligate; or they may be only distinguished as worldly-minded and negligent of God and of duty. Their own will is, in the main, the rule of their conduct, their own gratification their end. They look to the present life, and are practically regardless of the life to come. Alas! how many must even this stronger description, "the wicked," comprehend!

But let us attend to the further description of the same character,—"him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not."

The man who serves God will be a devout worshipper of him in all his ordinances, public and private; though his service of God will not be confined to acts of worship. He will be a man of prayer. Day by day, he will, as our Lord enjoins, "enter into his closet, and shut his door, and pray to his Father, which seeth in secret." Nor will he do this only from a sense of duty, but from a deep feeling of wants to be supplied, and of happiness to be enjoyed in communion with God. He will be a *spiritual* worshipper. He will daily meditate on the word of God, and delight therein. He will hallow the day of God, and employ the whole of it for the purposes for which it was appointed. The glorious gospel of God his Saviour, will be "all his salvation and all

his desire." He will "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord." "The love of Christ will sweetly constrain him to live no longer to himself, but to him that died for him and rose again."

Thus instructed and furnished for the work of God, he will aim to serve him in all the duties and engagements of life. He will "not be slothful in business," but will aim to be at the same time "fervent in spirit," doing all "as unto the Lord, and not unto men." He will endeavour to set "the Lord always before him," to be "in the fear of the Lord all the day long." He will be conscientious in all his dealings; true to all his engagements; patient, benevolent, kind and useful; careful to improve his talents, as one that must give account. He will consider himself as the steward of whatever possessions providence may commit to him: he will strive to be moderate in all his cares about worldly good, temperate in the enjoyment of it, liberal in communicating it for the glory of God, and the good of his fellow-servants and fellow-creatures.

But, if this be to serve God, alas! how many come under the description of those "that serve him not." Taking this term in the most strict and literal manner, does it not seem to describe even the great majority of professed

Christians? We will not say that they are openly wicked. We will not charge them with dishonesty and profligacy; but can it be said of them that they "serve God?" My dear friends, let me intreat you to examine most seriously into this question; for it will be found of infinite importance. Can you be called "the servants of God?" What do you habitually do in his service? You come to church—but are you devout worshippers? You say your prayers—but with what fervent and holy affections? You read your Bible—but with what love for its sacred truths? And can it be said that your religion influences your habitual conduct? the spending of your time, the management of your business, your intercourse with the world? The service of God extends to all these things, and where it is really performed, to every part of life.

There are those who "serve God" but alas! are not the majority "those who serve him not?"

And, brethren, this distinction is, as I have said, a most essential one in the characters of men. How important it will afterwards prove in its *consequences*, I shall have to show; but I now urge that it is of the utmost consequence in itself. It is not enough that we be moral, decent, respectable in the world: we must be religious—the servants of God—the servants of Christ. What!

is it of importance that we yield to *all* their dues, except to the God that made us, and the Saviour that redeemed us? Is it important that we fulfil the duties owing from man to man, and is it of inferior consequence that we fulfil those owing to Almighty God? As well might we pretend that all offences in a state were to be carefully avoided, except treason against the head of the state, and that that was of no moment! We may argue that we best shew our piety to God by virtuous conduct towards men; but, in fact, by neglecting piety towards God, we subvert the foundation of the virtues between man and man. The fear of God and the love of God prevailing in the heart, would prevent all the vices, and more than half the miseries of mankind: and not only so, but where the fear of God and the love of God do not prevail in the heart, there the essential principle of goodness is wanting, and no portion of *true* virtue exists in us. The distinction between "those who serve God, and those who serve him not," is of essential, of indispensable, of infinite and eternal consequence; and if we are not positively the servants of God, we are positively, however little we may suppose it, the servants of Satan; for there are but two causes and two services in the world, that of God, and that of the great enemy of God and man—and there is no intermediate, no neutral

state:—they divide the whole world between them.

II. I proceed to observe, secondly, that this great DISTINCTION OF CHARACTER is not at present adequately marked or regarded.

The world indeed recognizes the distinction between the moral and the profligate. Honesty and social virtue are generally respected, though great tolerance is exercised towards many vices which do not immediately disturb a man's intercourse with his equals. But the distinction between "him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not," men of the world will, in no proper manner acknowledge. They will not admit the superior excellence of the strictly religious man. On the contrary he is very generally looked upon with an evil eye. If his piety is not pronounced hypocrisy, and his zeal fanaticism, yet at least his conscientiousness is regarded as preciseness, and his devoutness as being "righteous over-much." Men will not admit that the strictly religious character is alone "the servant of God;" they will insist upon it that they are so too, and as acceptably so as he: though it may be hard to point out in what their service of God consists. "The world knoweth not," nor acknowledgeth devout Christians; and St. John intimates that this

should not surprise them, seeing the same world "knew not" their Lord and master. If it carry its hostility no further than "speaking evil of them falsely for his name's sake;" if it do not add persecutions to reproaches; they fare better than a great proportion of their predecessors.

Not only so: but God himself in his providence, does not by any means, in this world, accurately mark the distinctions between the righteous and wicked.

There is indeed enough of retribution even here to make it in general visibly true concerning more notorious offenders, that "the way of transgressors is hard." The robber commonly comes to an untimely end: the drunkard and the licentious man destroy their health: and the fraudulent dealer ruins his character. But still the punishment of the wicked, and the reward of the righteous are to such a degree deferred, as to give occasion to the wise man's observation, that here "all things come alike to all." And hence many sinners are emboldened in their crimes; "because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." They know not, they will not know, that "the goodness of God" is designed to "lead them to repentance:" "but after their hardness and impenitent heart they

treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath."

Nay, here often the conscientiousness of the righteous must lead him to sacrifice present interest; his holy moderation, to forego many present indulgences. In the conflict against sin, he often endures much anguish of heart. Here "many are the troubles of the righteous:" and not unfrequently it is an occasion of painful temptation to him to behold "the prosperity of the wicked," while he himself suffers adversity. The Psalmist in the seventy-third Psalm has recorded his feelings in such circumstances. He was tempted to say, "verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency:" and we can hardly suppose Lazarus a stranger to such feelings towards Dives.

A further cause of affliction to the righteous is that he frequently sees the cause of God, which is dearer to him than any personal interest, trodden down under the insolent "triumphings of the ungodly." Trials like these, led the holy prophet Jeremiah thus to address himself to Almighty God: "Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee, yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?" And it is to the abuse made of such

cases, and the encouragements drawn from them to irreligion, that the passage of my text refers. "Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord: yet ye say, what have we spoken so much against thee? Ye have said, it is vain to serve God: and what profit is it, that we have kept his ordinance? . . . And now we call the proud happy: yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are delivered." And therefore it is promised, "Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not."

III. And this brings us to the last thing proposed; to shew, that THOUGH THE DIFFERENCE IS NOT NOW MARKED, IT SHALL HEREAFTER BE—AND THAT IN SUCH A MANNER THAT NONE SHALL ANY MORE BE ABLE TO OVERLOOK IT.

The prophetical connexion implies that at the coming of Christ an important discrimination should be made. And so it proved. That which to the believing part of the Jewish nation was "the acceptable year of the Lord," became to the unbelieving part "the day of vengeance of our God." And to this the words which follow refer: "ye shall return and discern between the righteous and the wicked"—"*for* behold the day cometh that

shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings."

But whatever discrimination took place at the first coming of Christ, was but a shadow of that which shall be made at those periods of "his coming" to which we all look forward.

The period of passing out of time into eternity shall be, to every individual, one of awful discrimination between the righteous and the wicked. I will only describe it to you in our Lord's own words. "It came to pass that the beggar"—the pious beggar,—"died, and was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died," —the ungodly rich man,—"and was buried, and in hell he lift up his eyes being in torments." Oh, who that witnessed the scene could fail now "to discern" between the one character and the other, and to correct his errors, if, unhappily, he had not before learned to prefer "affliction with the people of God," to the momentary pleasures of sin. And a similar discrimination, be assured, shall take place among us at our death, if some of us have served God, and some have not served

him. Yes; and this discrimination, though at present the object of faith, shall one day be made visible to us all.

For there shall be a day of "manifestation"—open, public "manifestation of the sons of God," —a day of "revelation,"—open, public discovery, —"of the righteous judgment of God:" a day and a state of retribution, where men shall no longer be dealt with any otherwise than according to their character, whether they are or are not servants of God through Jesus Christ.

And, O brethren, hear and ponder the language in which divine revelation declares the coming of that day. "There shall be a resurrection both of the just and of the unjust." "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every man may receive for the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." "The hour is coming when all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth, they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation." "When the Son of man shall come in his glory and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory; and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth the

sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say to them on his right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:" and to them on his left hand, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."

Thus does our blessed Lord, (who himself shall then be our Judge, but who is now our gracious Saviour) describe to us the awful decisions of that day. This, he solemnly assures us, is the end of all the living, that they shall either go away "into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels"—or enter "into life eternal:" and this, according as their character has here been! Shall there remain any one in that day who shall fail "to discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not?" Not one. The gay shall then confess that the righteous is the only happy man. The wise men of this world, that he was the only prudent man. Yes, brethren, ye that have most despised the servants of God (for they are despised in this evil world) shall then be forced to revise your judgments—to retract your errors—

to adopt another opinion of the choice, the character, and the lot of the seriously religious man. "Ye shall return and discern between the righteous and the wicked."

But alas! this change in your judgment, if it take not place before that day, will come too late. It can then give birth only to unavailing lamentations, while you see 'the righteous man stand in great boldness, and you repenting and groaning for anguish of spirit, say within yourselves, This was he whom we had sometime in derision and a proverb of reproach. We fools counted his life madness, and his end to be without honour—How is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the saints!'

Ah, brethren! you may think lightly now of despising and sneering at the servants of God—you may persuade yourselves, that so high a character belongs not to them:—at present you "discern" them not: this has been the lot of the righteous in every successive age—which made our Lord pronounce, "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake." You may utterly scorn the idea of being numbered among them—and of bearing their reproach: but another day ye shall "return" and take different views of the whole question—of your own character and of theirs—of this

world with its fashionable votaries and fashionable pursuits—and of the world to come. Depend upon it, you will think differently of all these things than you now do. And God forbid that this should not be till it is for ever too late!

I have said that it will be too late if it be not till you see the discrimination actually made, till the Master of the house hath risen up and shut to the door, and the doom of the righteous and of the wicked is fixed. But, brethren, these things which are written in the inspired word of God, are "written for our learning." You are here forewarned of these approaching events, that you may profit by the warning—that you may "foresee the evil and hide yourselves from it." The assurance is given you that you will *one day* be forced thus to correct your errors, in order that you may voluntarily correct them *now*. And as this is the end at which the Scriptures aim, so is it the aim of our preaching the truths of Scripture.

O then be persuaded, "return," review, reconsider these things more perfectly *now*. You are dying creatures—dying sinners—you must shortly stand before your Judge. To which class will you then wish you had belonged? Conscience within you answers. To that of the servants of God. O then shall the love of the world—shall the fear of man—shall present interest—shall

pleasure—shall an evil heart of unbelief—shall the love of sin prevail over the authority of God—over the sentence of your own judgment—over the pleadings of your own conscience—over the strivings of God's Spirit? and will you still tread the paths of sin, and folly, and worldliness, and forgetfulness of God? Will you flatter yourselves that what we plead for is too much? It is only the service of God—the belief of his word and a life directed by that belief, that we urge upon you. Did you ever know one, who as death approached, and that day of "discerning," spoken of in my text, drew near, thought that he had been too strict, regretted that he had taken too much pains to save his soul? No: your conscience says, We are not too strict; it is only your inclination that argues against your conscience.

At all events, beware lest you pronounce us too strict—merely because you *wish* to think us so—merely because the practice of the world favours that decision. In your own consciences you feel that there is no force in such reasons. Neither, on the other hand, do we desire that you should take things upon our authority. No; we only make one demand, to the reasonableness of which you cannot refuse your assent—"Search the scriptures daily" and with prayer to God—"whether these things be so or not," and implore grace to

act according to the conclusions to which such a diligent and humble investigation will infallibly lead you.

Should you find that you have hitherto been wrong; remember, the detection of your error may be salutary. The blood of Jesus Christ is able to purge away your guilt; the grace of his Spirit is able to change your heart. You may yet pass from the world of the wicked and be joined to the number of the servants of God and blessed with all their blessings.

But if conscience bears you witness as in the sight of God that you are the servants of the Lord—that you have returned to him from your wanderings—have truly repented of your sins, thankfully accepted the salvation of Christ, and yielded yourselves to his service, to walk before him in holiness and righteousness to your lives' end, that there is no sin which you do not strive to put from you, no duty which you allow yourselves to neglect, that you are laying up for yourselves treasure not on earth, but in heaven, and thus looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life—if this be the case, the text speaks infinite consolation to you. A wide difference shall be made in your state too, but a difference that is infinitely glorious. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet

appear what we shall be, but we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." Bear up under present trials—hold on in the path of duty, and look to the glory which shall be revealed. "Be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

SERMON XIX.

2 CORINTHIANS iv. 1.

THEREFORE SEEING WE HAVE THIS MINISTRY, AS WE HAVE RECEIVED MERCY, WE FAINT NOT.

We are indebted to these Epistles to the Corinthians, and by consequence, in a certain sense, to those false teachers who gave occasion to them, for many interesting notices of the Apostle's private history, and for many fine displays of the spirit which actuated him. He has to vindicate his own apostolic commission, and in so doing he explains the nature of the ministry committed to him; and asserts also the faithfulness and purity with which he executed his commission. "Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not: but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience, in the sight of God."

From the words of the text we will consider,

I. THE NATURE OF THE MINISTRY COMMITTED TO THE APOSTLE.

II. WHAT THERE WAS TENDING TO MAKE HIM FAINT IN THE DISCHARGE OF IT.

III. WHAT SUPPORTED HIM SO, THAT HE "FAINTED NOT."

I. ON THE NATURE OF THE MINISTRY COMMITTED TO THE APOSTLE, the preceding chapters throw ample light. "God hath made us able ministers of the New Testament," or new covenant: "not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses, for the glory of his countenance, which glory was to be done away; how shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? For, if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory? For even that which was made glorious, had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious."

The passage requires attention; but it will

repay the careful examination of every serious student of Scripture.

The Apostle is contrasting the law and the gospel. The one he calls "the letter," the other "the spirit:" the one, "the ministration of death" and "of condemnation," the other, "the ministration of the spirit" and "of righteousness:" the one, "that which is done away," the other, "that which remaineth." Now the moral law of God, "written and engraven on tables of stone" by the finger of God himself, was not in one sense mere external "letter," but "spiritual," "holy, just, and good." Nor was it in this sense to be "done away:" but it abideth for ever as the universal rule of right and wrong. Neither again was the Jewish dispensation, when properly used, "a ministration of death and condemnation." Through the gospel to which it pointed, and which it exhibited in types and shadows, it might become "a ministration of righteousness and of the spirit." But then the Jews, especially in the Apostle's time, looked not beyond "the letter," the mere external observance of their religion, which they opposed to the gospel: and thus the letter could only "kill," while the spiritual and right understanding of their religion, as pointing them to the gospel of Christ, would have "given them life."

But to sinners the moral law of God, in itself considered, can only be a "ministration of death and of condemnation." Its language is, "He that doeth these things shall live by them," but "the soul that sinneth, it shall die." As therefore "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," the divine law, excellent as it is in itself, can bring us no help: it can but pronounce the sentence of death and condemnation against us. We should all feel this: and under the sense of our manifold transgressions, our guilt and misery, should cry earnestly to God in the language of the Psalmist, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." Till we have this feeling concerning ourselves, powerfully brought home to our hearts and consciences by the convincing energy of the Holy Ghost; we are unprepared for the gospel of Christ, disqualified for apprehending, or valuing, or using it aright. "They that are whole have no need of the physician." The innocent man, or he who thinks himself innocent, values not a pardon. He who apprehends not himself to be lost, cannot feel his want of a Saviour. Without feeling our guilt and condemnation by the law, we may call Christ our Saviour, and profess faith in his name, but it will be all lifeless profession: we shall have no communion with

him: we shall turn the gospel itself into mere "letter which killeth," instead of "spirit which giveth life."

But when we have in our own case apprehended and felt aright that the law must be as "the ministration of death," that it brings us in guilty and under "condemnation," even for the imperfection of our best works; then shall we proportionably value aright the gospel as "the ministration of righteousness and of the spirit"—as bringing us free justification, deliverance from guilt and condemnation by faith in Christ alone, and communicating to us the grace of the Holy Spirit, by which we may be made free from sin, and alive to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This was the ministry committed to the Apostle —"to testify the gospel of the grace of God"— to proclaim that whosoever, feeling his guilt and danger by sin, believeth in the Lord Jesus Christ is, through him, "justified from all things, from which he could not be justified by the law of Moses"—to preach therefore every where "repentance and remission of sins in Christ's name,"— and to say,

> 'Ho! ye despairing sinners, come,
> And trust upon the Lord.'

And God every where wrought with his word;

so that the careless were awakened, sinners were converted from the error of their ways, found peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord, became in Christ new creatures, walked religiously in good works, and rejoiced in hope of the glory of God.

Such was the ministry committed to the Apostle, of the glory and blessedness of which you have heard how he speaks. The law had its "glory:" and a great and illustrious glory it is, and ever must be, that belongs to the moral law of God. The Jewish dispensation too had its glory—separating the people from a world sunk in idolatry, giving them the knowledge of the true God, and shadowing forth to them the gospel of Christ. And this glory of the law was indicated by the lustre which beamed forth from the face of Moses, after he had been receiving the law from God—so brightly beamed forth,—that the children of Israel were not able to look upon his countenance. But compared with the glory of the gospel, that of the law was but as the light of the moon to that of the sun. "If the ministration of condemnation," saith the Apostle, "be glory, how much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory? For even that which was made glorious (the law) hath no glory in this respect by reason of the glory that excelleth," or in comparison with the glory of

the gospel: the glory of the gospel quite eclipseth and throweth into shade the minor glory of the law.

Such then was the ministry committed to the Apostle: and it is the same also which is committed unto us, and which in our humble measure we exercise among you. We come unto you, "preaching peace by Jesus Christ;" proclaiming unto you forgiveness of sins, and beseeching you to be reconciled unto God through him. See that ye refuse not them that speak unto you in Christ's name. See that ye neglect not so great salvation. All that faithfully preach the gospel, "unto men, are unto God a sweet savour of Christ;" to those who receive and comply with their message, they are "the savour of life unto life;" but to others they will be found "the savour of death unto death." May you all, beloved brethren, be found among the former, and thus become "our crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord Jesus."

I. We proceed to speak of THOSE THINGS WHICH MIGHT TEND TO MAKE THE APOSTLE "FAINT" in the discharge of this ministry.

1. And first, it is obvious to mention the incessant labours and persecutions which he had to undergo. "In labours,"—he says himself in this Epistle,—"in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths

oft. In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers....in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." He alludes to these things in the chapter from which our text is taken, by no means, however, in a desponding strain—but on the contrary with a thankful acknowledgment of the support he received. "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body."

But though the Apostle could declare, "None of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself;" yet were his labours and sufferings in the cause of the gospel such as must have exhausted all mere natural resources, and worn down the strength which was not supplied from above.

2. But, secondly, the very sense which he had of the inconceivable importance of the ministry committed to him, and of the infinitely momentous consequences which it involved, might well tend to make him faint.

Of this point he takes striking notice in the second chapter of this epistle, where he says, (in words already alluded to,) "We are unto God a

sweet savour of Christ, both in them that are saved and in them that perish: to the one we are the savour of life unto life, and to the other we are the savour of death unto death." He immediately adds, "And who is sufficient for these things?" When, brethren, we consider the worth of immortal souls, the question of everlasting bliss or everlasting woe,—and that this depends upon men's receiving the gospel in faith, and love, and obedience, or not so receiving it; that to us who preach is committed the office of ministering it unto you who hear; and that if we be not faithful in the discharge of our office, your blood may be required at our hands—when we consider these things, we must not only exclaim with the Apostle: "Who is sufficient for these things?" but we might be ready, and sometimes are ready, to shrink from the service altogether, and to plead with Moses, "O my Lord, send I pray thee by the hand of him whom thou wilt send," by any one rather than by me! These considerations the ordination service of our church forcibly presses upon us: 'Have always printed on your remembrance how great treasure is committed to your charge. For they are the sheep of Christ, which he bought with his death, and for whom he shed his blood. The church and congregation whom you must serve is his spouse and his body. And if it shall happen the same church,

or any member thereof, to take any hurt or hinderance by reason of your negligence, ye know the greatness of the fault, and also the horrible punishment that will ensue. Wherefore consider with yourselves the end of your ministry, and see that you never cease your labour, your care, and diligence, until you have done all that in you lieth. . . . . to bring all such as shall be committed to your charge unto that agreement in the faith and knowledge of God, and to that ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ, that there be no place left among you, either for error in religion or viciousness of life.'

3. Finally, the Apostle, like every servant of God that preceded him, and every minister of Christ that followed him, would have to complain that with respect to many he appeared " to labour in vain, and spend his strength for nought, and in vain." " All day long have I stretched out my hand to a disobedient and gainsaying people." And none can estimate the painful feelings which this would excite in his mind, except in proportion as he can enter into those other sentences of the Apostle: " God is my witness how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ;" and, " My little children, of whom I travail in birth until Christ be formed in you."

And often even those, who as he hoped, had re-

ceived the gospel, occasioned him painful anxiety —while he "feared that as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so their minds should be corrupted from the simplicity of Christ"—and while he saw the affections of his spiritual children withdrawn from him, and transferred to persons little worthy of them. Hence after that enumeration of his labours and sufferings which we before in part recited, he adds—"Besides those things which are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." All this, added to that constant inward conflict against sin, which is the Christian's great and standing burden here upon earth, might well justify the Apostle in speaking of himself as needing some powerful support to keep him from "fainting."

III. What the CONSIDERATION WAS, which mainly SUPPORTED HIS MIND, and continually animated him afresh to the conflict, is the point which remains to be considered. He expresses it in the words, "As we have received mercy."

He looked back to all that he had been, and to what had been his situation—when he was, as he expresses it, "foolish, disobedient, deceived; serving divers lusts and pleasures; hateful, and hating others"—"by nature a child of wrath, even as others:" he thought particularly of his

own case, who had been "a persecutor and a blasphemer, and injurious"—"making havoc of the church"—"and compelling" the disciples of Christ "to blaspheme." He looked back upon all this, and he considered what God had done for him: how "of his great love wherewith he had loved him, even when dead in sins, he had quickened him" —had "saved him and called him with a holy calling"—"not by works of righteousness which he had done," but of his own "mercy" and grace alone: how God had made him "a chosen vessel" unto himself—appointing him a preacher and an Apostle of the faith which once he destroyed: how he still pardoned him—and preserved him and upheld him—made him the instrument of "turning many to righteousness"—and inspired him with "a hope full of immortality:" thus feeling how in him "Christ Jesus had shewed forth all long-suffering for a pattern to them that should after believe in him to life everlasting." He could not but ask, "What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits?" Shall I think any labour too great, any suffering too severe, to be undergone for him who hath had such mercy on me, to whom I owe my soul and all my eternal hopes? Shall I grow "weary and faint in my mind," for whom Christ hath done such things—having "redeemed me to God with his blood?" No—"the love of Christ

constrained him:" and, if at any time he was ready to faint, the fresh contemplation of this subject revived and armed him again for the conflict. The thought also, how much others needed the same mercy which he had found, and must perish without it; the hope that through his means they also might receive it, and the visible proof he had that numbers had received, and were thus receiving it: these thoughts could never let him cease his care, his labour, his pains, for this object —never suffer him to faint in his work. No—all his aim should be, "to finish his course with joy, and the ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus." Still would he go on unwearied by labours, unsubdued by persecutions, and unexhausted even by disappointments and ungrateful returns—

> 'Still would he tell to sinners round,
> What a bless'd Saviour he had found:
> Would point to his atoning blood,
> And say, Behold the way of God.'

And this, brethren, must be to us also the true spring of all perseverance in God's ways on our own part, and of all permanent exertions for the good of others. When we have (as St. Peter expresses it) "tasted that the Lord is gracious;" when we have felt the misery of sin, and daily feel the comfort of God's pardoning mercy in

Christ; when we "know the love of Christ" in our own case, and see that it and it alone is sufficient to reach the case of others also; to redeem them from sin, from sorrow, and from hell; to raise them to holiness, to communion with God, and to heavenly bliss: when the impression of these things is strong upon our minds, it will cause that we shall "never fail," never be "barren or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ"—"never be weary and faint in our minds." Then shall we find that the joy of the Lord will be our strength for doing and suffering all the will of God. Then shall we not be slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience "having done the will of God," "now inherit his promises." The sense of God's pardoning saving mercy, so far from making us become careless and relaxing our diligence, will have the very contrary effect, will cause us to be "steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord."

Brethren, it is the want of seeking and finding this blessing—the want of the sense of having "received mercy,"—saving mercy,—that makes us all move so sluggishly and heavily in the service of God, and makes us so backward to exert ourselves, or so soon weary of exerting ourselves for the good of others. This consciousness,—the lively

sense of God's mercy in our hearts,—would open our mouths to show forth his praise, would stimulate our endeavours, and give an animation and zeal to all our proceedings; and to our prayers also, which would assuredly bring down a greater blessing upon all we do. It would give to our preaching, and to our pastoral visits, and to your instruction of your families, and to your visits to the poor, or to your exertions in teaching their children, and to every work and labour of love, a new character. It would carry with it a two-fold blessedness; to those who exercised the duty, as well as to those who were the objects of it.

Let us contemplate then more diligently in the light of Scripture, and praying for the teaching of the Holy Spirit, "the love of Christ," and by scriptural means and scriptural evidence, to ascertain its actual application to ourselves for the pardon of our sins and the salvation of our souls, that the influence of it may appear in our Spirit, and life, and conversation.

But have you indeed any proof that you have yourselves "received mercy?" The mercies of God's providence you have undoubtedly received. The means of his grace are set before you; but have you, I say, received them? Hath he "quickened you, who were dead in trespasses and sins." "Being justified by faith, have you peace

with God through our Lord Jesus Christ?" Are you walking in newness of life—and thus giving proof that, as time passes on, you are drawing nearer to the heavenly rest? Oh! examine these points with the seriousness which they deserve!

Perhaps you are avowedly strangers to all such blessedness—perhaps treating with contempt all pretences to the enjoyment of them as enthusiastic. If so, are you not strangers also to every thing like living devoted to the service of God? Yes, your spirit and your lives give evidence that "the love of Christ has never constrained you to live no longer to yourselves, but to him that died for you, and rose again." And is yours then a Christian state? Oh, no longer rest in it! Pray to God that the gospel may come to you not in word only, but "in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance."

SERMON XX.

REVELATIONS XIV. 13.

AND I HEARD A VOICE FROM HEAVEN, SAYING UNTO ME, WRITE, BLESSED ARE THE DEAD WHICH DIE IN THE LORD FROM HENCEFORTH: YEA, SAITH THE SPIRIT, THAT THEY MAY REST FROM THEIR LABOURS; AND THEIR WORKS DO FOLLOW THEM.

EVERY thing pertaining to this verse is worthy of attention. The sentiments—the connexion—the mode of communication are all remarkable. It is not simply the sacred writer who, under his accustomed inspiration pronounces those blessed who die in the Lord: but he hears a voice from heaven declaring it. Not only so; this same voice commands him to record in writing what he heard, that it might be preserved for the consolation of the faithful in all ages,—both for the dying, and for those who are bereaved of their friends by death; "write, blessed are the dead that die in the Lord." Nor is even this all, but the Holy Spirit responds to the sentiment, and

confirms it by concurring testimony, and by reasons alleged. "Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours."

Do we find it then difficult to believe and realize the thought that more blessed are good men "already dead, than the living yet alive?" Such testimony as that before us, so delivered, and so confirmed, may well strengthen our wavering faith.

Our Lord, in his beatitudes, pronounced many living characters blessed, whom men are little apt to think so. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." "Blessed are they that mourn." "Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake." But this declaration of the blessedness of the dead is, perhaps, yet more remote from the apprehensions of at least the gay and thoughtless part of mankind.

It is not, however, all the dead who are here pronounced blessed. As "there shall hereafter be a resurrection," so there is now, in an unseen world, a life "both of the just and of the unjust:" and such is the state of the latter, that "good had it been for them had they never been born."

Let us then proceed to shew,

I. WHO ARE BLESSED AFTER DEATH:

II. AT WHAT PERIOD THEY ARE BLESSED:

III. WHY THEY ARE BLESSED.

I. WHO ARE BLESSED AFTER DEATH.

The text expressly states it: "the dead who die in the Lord." To be "in the Lord," or "in Christ," is very common language in Scripture. "If any man be *in Christ*, he is a new creature." "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them that are *in Christ Jesus*, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." "Abide in me and I in you; as the branch cannot bear fruit except it abide in the vine: no more can ye, except ye abide *in me*." Such is the nature of true faith in Christ, so close a connexion doth it form, so intimate a communion doth it maintain with him, that true believers in Christ are said to be "in him," and to make one with him, "as the branch is with the vine." They rely upon him for every thing, they receive continually from "his fulness;" by grace derived from him, they are fruitful in all good works: they "live the life which they live in the flesh, by the faith of the Son of God, who loved them and gave himself for them." And they who thus live "in the Lord," "die in the Lord:" for assuredly he who hath been with them through life, will never 'suffer them in their last hour, for any pains of death, to fall from him.' "None of us," the Apostle sublimely declares of true Christians, "None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." For whether we

live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord's: for to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord, both of the dead and living."

But we must observe that we have no encouragement here given to that delusive but too common language, which leads persons to conceive of all who die as obtaining 'a happy release.' It is painful to urge this consideration, but it is necessary. We hear people who are sick and miserable, continually speaking, as if all their evils would of course be at an end, would it only please God to remove them by death, without ever considering whether they are fit to die or not. And too often we hear others, and even those who should know better, encouraging this delusion by speaking of all sufferings as over to those who are dead, without even implying any question as to their preparation for a better world. This is unchristian language, the language not of faith, but of unbelief, or at least of inconsideration, and it tends to mischief. No one, I trust, will think that I would countenance the opposite error. I have an utter aversion to pronouncing any opinion concerning departed individuals, where circumstances do not warrant a decidedly favourable one. But let us not delude the living, and virtually deny Christian

truths, out of a supposed charity for the dead, which can avail them nothing. When any have departed this life, we have done with them; we are not their judges; and unless we can properly use their case for the advantage of those who survive, let us be silent and leave them to God. This is our duty with respect to the departed. But when we speak not of individuals, but of *characters* generally, of the righteous and the wicked, of believers and unbelievers, of them that serve God, and them that serve him not, we must pronounce after, "the oracles of God," that "the righteous hath hope in his death," but "the wicked is driven away in his wickedness:" that whereas on the one hand 'the souls of the faithful after they are delivered from the burden of the flesh, are with God in joy and felicity,' "the wicked," on the contrary, "and all the people that forget God are turned into hell,"—in our Lord's awful words they "lift up their eyes in hell, being in torments." We must declare that while death indeed 'releases' the souls of those who are pardoned and justified in Christ Jesus from the prison of the body, it is to all who have not improved the season allotted them for seeking pardon and peace with God, no other than a removal from prison to execution. It is painful to urge this part of the subject: but I say again, it is necessary: necessary for your warning and salvation, and necessary to our faithfulness.

As then, my beloved brethren, we would wish our latter end to be "peace," and our eternity to be blessed, let us now examine seriously into the state of our souls. Should we be this day called to follow those who have gone before us into eternity, what would be our condition? Were we to die this day, should we "die in the Lord," or should we not? Can we be willing to leave in doubt, a question on which our everlasting bliss or woe depends? And if we would know whether dying we "should die in the Lord," let us inquire whether living we "live unto the Lord." Have we fled to Christ by faith, for pardon and peace with God? Have we felt, deeply felt, our need of these things, and that we should find them no where else than in "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." Have we then come unto Christ? Do we sit at his feet to hear his words and learn of him? Do we commit our souls into his hands,—as those who feel the importance of the deposit,—to be pardoned, justified, sanctified, and saved by him? Are we becoming, in consequence, "new creatures?"—for "in Christ Jesus nothing availeth but faith which worketh by love." Does our faith work by love, and cause us to choose, and devote ourselves to the service of God. We have known, we surely do or may know, those in whom such

effects of their faith appear—who give evidence that they are "in Christ," not by profession only, but by a living faith. We have known such "live unto the Lord," and, blessed be God, we have known them "die in the Lord:" and assuredly dying as well as living, they have been and are the Lord's. They walked with God, and now "they are not any more with us in this world, for "God hath taken them." They are "blessed:" "blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth."

II. This brings us briefly to notice the question, AT WHAT PERIOD THEY ARE BLESSED. Here is a remarkable word in the text: "from henceforth"—immediately—from the very time that they quit the body. "Then the spirit returneth to God who gave it." But why is the apostle so particularly commanded to introduce this declaration, concerning the blessedness of the righteous after death, precisely in this part and point of his series of prophecies? and why so distinctly to mark this "henceforth." These questions seem to admit of a very satisfactory answer. He is speaking of periods and events when, though the cause of Christ would triumph, it would not triumph without the severe sufferings and persecutions of his saints. Therefore it is observed in the verse before my text,

"Here is the patience of the saints." Many would now be called to seal their testimony with their blood. How seasonable therefore the assurance of the blessedness of all that "die in the Lord." But still we have the "henceforth" to account for. Had it not always been the case that such characters were blessed—blessed especially from the very period of their death? No doubt it had: yet it had not always been *known* that they were blessed from the moment of death. During the long dark night of popery, the interested cunning of some, working upon the ignorance of others, and taking advantage of the humble consciousness of unworthiness prevalent in good men, and the guilty fears, united with unholy hopes, which will be found in bad men, persuaded them that the long and bitter sufferings of purgatory must be endured, before even the souls of the faithful could be prepared for the presence of God. What a dismal prospect must this have presented to the departing spirit! The wicked man might be content to admit it, as better than "the fearful looking for" of everlasting punishment: but how different a view did it present to the departing spirit of the righteous, from that of being at once "with Christ!" How were those conscientious persons who lived under the prevalence of such gloomy error to be pitied! But the blessed refor-

mation dissipated,—it is to be hoped for ever,—the delusion; and taught that 'the souls of the faithful, after they are delivered from the burden of the flesh, are with God, in joy and felicity.' Now it would appear to be precisely at this point in the series of these propheeies that the text is introduced, and that to this period of the reformation it immediately refers. An angel had been seen flying in the midst of heaven "having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth:" another had followed saying, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen," which is understood of the fatal blow given to the power of the Church of Rome: and presently is introduced the announcement of my text, a voice from heaven commanding, "Write, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord *from henceforth:* yea saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them." It seems therefore to be with much reason, that the text has been considered as conveying an allusion to the removal of one of those grand errors by which mankind had been held in bondage, and the establishment of the true doctrine of scripture, concerning the immediate blessedness of the righteous, to the great and unspeakable comfort of all true Christians: a doctrine so peculiarly necessary also to the times of persecution, in which it was recovered and re-established.

But whatever may be thought of this allusion, the text has always been urged as a valid argument against the popish doctrine of purgatory. And certainly it is, at least, as decisive against the notion of the sleep of the soul from death to the resurrection—a notion suited only to cloud the prospects and sadden the hearts of the righteous, and to strengthen the hands of the wicked, who will easily persuade themselves that if they be once permitted to fall into such a sleep, they are not very likely ever to be awakened from it again. But how could the dead who die in the Lord, be so solemnly pronounced "blessed," "blessed from henceforth"—immediately blessed—if they fell into a state of insensibility for some thousands of years? How could St. Paul, when in a strait whether to choose life or death, because the advantages of each were so great, have yet declared that "to depart and *be with Christ* was far better" for himself? What! a state of utter insensibility preferable to that state of high enjoyment and blessed usefulness in which he lived? No! away with such novelties—the mere figments of men "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." Let us be assured that when dead to this world, we still live in another: and that if we here live and die in the Lord, we shall there be immediately blessed beyond

all our present conceptions—even though some further accessions of blessedness will remain for us at the resurrection.

III. We come then, lastly, to consider THE REASONS why such are blessed.

And here a wide field opens before us—in which however we are little competent to expatiate. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." We may easily darken counsel by words without knowledge. Yet who can abstain from indulging a few reflections upon so blessed a subject? And to a certain extent we have the Scriptures for our guide: so far therefore we may travel safely, as well as pleasantly.

"Yea," suggests "the Spirit" in my text, "that they may rest from their labours," and "their works do follow them."

"They rest from their labours." The word may extend to every thing which makes this life a state of toil and trouble.

There is "no more death" for them. Death was the term in which the original sentence against sin was denounced: and death has ever since been "the king of terrors." It impends over all the living: they,—the living—"know that they must

die;" and this forms a gloomy boundary to all our prospects here below. But blessed are the dead that have died in the Lord—for they have met their last enemy—their last conflict is over, and has ended well! while ours is yet to come. "Thanks be to God, he hath given them the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." It is our Lord's own remark, "Neither can they die any more, for they are equal unto the angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection."

Further, personal suffering can no more assail them. "The inhabitant shall no more say I am sick."

They are subject to no more separations; to no more of those bereavements and other removals, which so often wring our hearts with anguish. It is observed concerning the inhabitants of that blessed world, "They go no more out." They are no more acquainted with sorrow. "God himself hath for ever wiped away all tears from their eyes." We may weep for them; but they have no more any thing to deplore.

This is a world of toil, and labour, and trouble. We must expect to find it so: and to find it so, more or less, to the end; and every day till the end. We are to be willing that it should be so: and to prepare ourselves to perform our duties

diligently, though they may be laborious, and to bear our trials patiently, though they should be severe. We naturally long for rest; but we must not expect it here. "This is not our rest, because it is polluted" by sin. "There remaineth," however, "a rest for the people of God. "And this idea is particularly held forth to us to encourage us. "They rest from their labours." Let us then be willing now to bear the burden and heat of the day: the time of rest will come; the rest—not of torpid inactivity—but of perfect enjoyment—if only we are found prepared for it.

"There" too, "the wicked cease from troubling"—as well as "the weary are at rest." Yes: if once we come to that blessed state, our hearts shall be no more pained and vexed at seeing the dishonour of God, and the ruin of men, and the manifold mischiefs and miseries which sin occasions: for there "the inhabitants are all righteous."

And better still than all, sin shall no more remain in ourselves or others. That great and severe labour therefore of the Christian life—the conflict of the spirit against the flesh,—is for ever over, to them that have died in the Lord. They are now "the spirits of just men made perfect." Yes, said an excellent Christian minister, to one whom he stiled 'his oldest and best friend,' after

expressing the delight it would have given him to see him once more on earth:—'We shall meet on better ground; we shall meet with higher powers; we shall meet with nobler affections; and there every note shall be love.'—Yes; if the short-lived communion of the saints on earth, themselves poor imperfect creatures in a sinful miserable world, be sometimes so delightful that "their hearts burn within them" at the recollection of it; what shall be the meeting of "the general assembly of the church of the first-born in heaven... in the presence of God the judge of all... and of Jesus the mediator of the new covenant," "who loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood, and hath made them kings and priests unto God and his Father"—where "the inhabitants are all righteous," and each of them "made perfect," and where they "go no more out for ever!" What! shall we bemoan any who have been removed to this blessed company before us? No: let us neither sorrow for them as if we had not such hopes; neither let us envy them, (as there might be more reason for our doing) but let us endeavour so to follow their good examples, and their faith, and patience, and piety, that with them we may at length be partakers of God's kingdom and glory.

I need not add, that they no more walk in

darkness—are no more exposed to temptation—the light of God's countenance is no more hidden from them for ever. No: "they have come out of great tribulation: and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell amongst them. They hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

"They rest from their labours, and their works do follow them." That is, they are gone to receive their reward, and every good work which they have performed (secretly perhaps and unknown to man) from love to God, for the glory of his name, and the benefit of his people, or any fellow-creature—comes in remembrance before God, and is gloriously (though of grace alone) rewarded.

We need hardly here say, that their works are not the ground of their acceptance with God. No: it is their "being in the Lord" Jesus Christ by faith which saves them: They are accepted for his sake. But being themselves accepted through Christ, their works also (for his sake)

meet with divine acceptance, approbation, and reward.

Brethren—we must all soon die; others are now the dead, and we are the living. We have carried many to their tombs—have wept over them—and made our reflections upon them. Others will soon do the same by us. And what will then be the importance of a thousand things which now excite our cares and labours?[1] What will it soon signify whether we have been successful in this and that pursuit, or the contrary? Whether we have been rich or poor, learned or unlearned, celebrated or unknown. If we die and sink into misery what will all our successes here avail us?

[1] The following striking passage was thought too personal to be admitted into the body of the Discourse, but it is here subjoined to show the general tone of the Author's mind.

"It is but a little time since those pews were filled by other occupiers—and their present possessors are fast changing, and going into eternity. It is but a few years since another held my place, and addressed you from this pulpit: and in a few years more, at furthest, some other preacher will from this place address another congregation. We are fast going hence: we shall be looked for and shall not be found: we shall be in eternity. Really when I indulge reflections of this kind, (which, thank God, I have no aversion to doing) when I look upon a large assembly like this, and think how soon all will be gone from this world—it makes all human pursuits which terminate with this world more insignificant than I have words to express."

Or if, on the other hand, death remove us to heaven—how insignificant will all our earthly disappointments appear! "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity! But to fear God and keep his commandments, this is the whole of man." Yes, brethren; this *is* important. *How* we have lived on earth will be important—infinitely important—to us for ever. Yet what effect their lives may have on their future eternal state;—this—this is the point on which, of all others, most men seem unconcerned. I say, we shall soon die, and whether we "die in the Lord" or not, this is the one thing all important to us. To attain this close of life is the only thing worth living for.

Brethren, is your course tending to such an issue as this? You hope so to end—but perhaps you are putting off preparation for it. Putting off to a future time the one thing needful, when we know not what a day may bring forth! This is indeed of all man's marvellous mistakes the strangest. Do we not continually see those taken away who had as good a right to count on life as we can have?

How then is this final blessedness to be attained? I have said before; by *living* in and to the Lord. Is religion—the service of God—the care

of our souls—our first, and greatest, and most serious concern from day to day? Are we searching the Scriptures diligently that through them we may find eternal life—meditating daily on the word of God? Are we humbling ourselves before God as miserable sinners—transgressors of his laws—and as such exposed to his wrath? And are we fleeing unto Christ as our only refuge from the wrath to come? Is our faith in him not a mere confession of his name, but an earnest intercourse of the soul with him—seeking his blessings—committing itself to his hands—yielding itself to his service? Are we taking his commandments as our rule, the light of our feet and the guide of our steps, labouring to have a conscience void of offence both towards God and towards men? Are we thus waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life? Such alone are safe. Let then those who are strangers to this serious, humble, and religious life—who live indifferent to religious subjects—beware how they deceive themselves: theirs is not the course to "bring a man peace at the last."

SERMON XXI.[1]

ROMANS xv. 29.

AND I AM SURE THAT WHEN I COME UNTO YOU, I SHALL COME IN THE FULNESS OF THE BLESSING OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.

BLESSED assurance! But do not suppose, brethren, that by taking this text under present circumstances, I, personally, am assuming apostolic language, and speaking with all that confidence which St. Paul might justly indulge. Yet I would cherish hope and expectation; would look, brethren, and would have you look for enlarged blessing from God.

My dear brethren, on returning unto you, and

[1] This was the last sermon that the author ever wrote or preached. It is given to the public at the request of a large number of his friends. It was written under very trying circumstances, with many interruptions arising from severe pain and increasing debility. It was preached October 5, at St. Mary's Church, Hull, after an absence of six months. On the following Friday, (October 10,) the author caught cold, and died on Thursday, October 16, 1834.

being again permitted to address you, after six months of almost entire silence, there are many interesting topics,—topics interesting to me, and I doubt not to you also,—on which I might speak. I might find somewhat not unimportant to say of my own illness, of what I have been called to suffer, of the lessons to be learned, and the benefits to be derived from it, by you as well as by myself. For as all chastisement, or affliction, is intended for the improvement of those who suffer it, so we are assured that "whether ministers be afflicted, or whether they be comforted," it is intended for the consolation and salvation of their people also.

I might speak to you again—and I hope without ostentation or presumption—of the consolations graciously vouchsafed under these afflictions; and which have impressed my mind in the strongest manner with the provision which God has made for his suffering and dying servants. I am thus emboldened to say for the encouragement of the timid, and of those that are prone to be cast down, "Fear none of those things which shall befal you," and which your heavenly Father may lay upon you, whether living or dying, whatever your apprehensions may depict them: but seek to live in communion with Him; and to Him cheerfully commit yourselves: he has ample consolations in store for such cases. I might speak to you again,

and I could do it with strong feelings of pleasure and gratitude, of the kindness and sympathy which have been shewn me, not only by you the people of my charge, but even by the town at large. This has been much beyond my expectation, as well as beyond all I felt myself entitled to. I hope I shall never forget it, but endeavour to return it, if God shall continue my life, and restore my strength by every species of service in my power. The Lord reward all those who have prayed for me, or served me, or felt interested for the welfare of me and my family, especially all those whose regard for me has been for the sake of the work of the Lord, in which I trust they have seen me engaged!

But interesting, or instructive, or pleasing as these several topics might be, they must all give place to one—a common one indeed, but one that deserves to supersede all besides—"the Gospel of Christ." Yes, brethren, in that are involved all our present consolations, and all our future hopes. Without that, we are all "sitting in darkness and the shadow of death," "fast bound in misery and iron," because of the wrath of God which our sins most righteously have deserved. But this "proclaims liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound:" it brings us "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."

This enables us to lift up our face to a forgiving God, and "having peace with God through Christ, to rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." Yea, and even "to glory in tribulations also," for the benefits of which they are made the instruments. This, brethren, this, the simple gospel of Christ, has long been increasingly 'my darling theme,' and I am ready to say,

'It shall be till I die!'

'Till then I would thy love proclaim,
With ev'ry fleeting breath;
And may the music of thy name
Refresh my soul in death.'

and I would let nothing supersede it; I only desire to bring it before you with increasing simplicity, increasing sense of its value, increasing zeal and affection, and with increasing blessing from God. Yet this will exclude nothing that is interesting and important in scripture; but only present it in the most advantageous light.

My text, you observe, speaks not simply of the gospel of Christ. It is the language of one who has proved, by happy experience, what that divine system can do for us. It speaks of "the blessing," yea, "the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ." As the apostle elsewhere speaks of "the unspeakable riches of Christ."

On these points then, let us speak in their order:

I. THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST:

II. THE BLESSING OF THE GOSPEL, or that blessing which it brings wherever it is cordially received.

III. The FULNESS of that blessing.

And may God give us to understand experimentally the subject on which we speak.

I. THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.

Need I among you, brethren, enter into the inquiry of what the gospel is, and of what it involves. Thanks be to God, I have proclaimed it to you a thousand times, with all the clearness of which I was capable. And this renders it less necessary to enter fully on it at present.

Yet must I not lament that there are numbers of whom we may say in the language of Moses, "The Lord hath not given you ears to hear, or a heart to understand, unto this day?"

And why hath he not? Because you have not desired it. Because you have not sought it. Because you have not been faithful to your convictions, you have not obeyed your consciences, you have not honestly used the means. Is it not so? Oh yes, there are yet many among us who are practically and habitually, through the week, careless about religion and their souls, about God, and Christ, and eternity. We have those who,

involved in the business of the world, neglect " the one thing needful." We have those who have never yet felt the burden of their sins, and have never yet been impelled to cry,—" What must I do to be saved ? " and therefore they neglect Christ. We have those who could never yet consent to part with their besetting sins, to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, to sacrifice the world, and its interests, and its favour, for the favour and blessing of God.

All such, alas, must necessarily be still strangers to the gospel of Christ, except at least in speculation. The gospel is " glad tidings of great joy," but it has never been felt as such by them. The gospel proclaims " liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." But what liberty have they derived from it ? Certainly not liberty to commit sin, for it has no such liberty to bestow: and liberty from the power of sin, liberty in the service of God, they have neither sought nor found.

Oh brethren, no longer continue in this state. For " if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost." And *you* will be lost and perish for ever if you find nothing more from the gospel than you have yet found. Oh now be stirred up to give " the more earnest heed to the things which ye hear, for " how shall you escape if you neglect so

great salvation?" May God grant that my having been spared, and permitted again to preach to you "the gospel of Christ," may prove the means of salvation to many who have hitherto been walking in "the broad road which leadeth to destruction." But no longer delay, lest "God swear in his wrath that you shall never enter into his rest." The gospel, you know, means "glad tidings, and it is the gospel *of our salvation*," or redemption from sin, and bondage, and condemnation.

It assumes therefore that we are in evil case to begin with. And who can look into his own heart, and compare himself with God's law, and not feel this to be the fact? Who has loved God with all his heart, and loved his neighbour as himself? Who has lived as he ought to have done? Oh, what evil tempers, thoughts, words, actions! What leaving "undone the things that we ought to have done," as well as "doing the things which we ought not to have done! Alas! there is no health in us."

And "the wages of sin is death." "The soul that sinneth, (and every soul hath sinned) shall die." Yes, we are all exposed to God's wrath and everlasting damnation, and must actually experience these evils, and sink under them for ever, except the gospel deliver us.

But now what is God's conduct to us lost and

perishing sinners? In one word, he hath provided for us "the gospel." And what is implied in that? Hear in the language of inspiration. "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world," though that was what might justly have been done, and what we might reasonably have expected;—yet "God sent not his Son into the world to condeman the world, but that the world through him might be saved." "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Mark *God's design:* that sinners, rebels, enemies, who even crucified the Lord of glory "should have everlasting life." It does not content the God of love merely, that you should "not perish:" it does not content him to receive back to some degree of favour, and to bestow some blessings upon you: his will, his gracious pleasure is to bestow upon you, yes, upon the most sinful of you, "eternal life," and all its infinite joys. He would bring you back to himself, and to heaven for ever! What glad tidings of great joy to all is this! Nothing short of this is God's merciful provision for you. Oh, how must you have mistaken his character, when you entertained hard thoughts of him, and fled from his presence.

And then in the next place mark *the means*, by

which he has accomplished his gracious purpose of bringing sinners to "eternal life." "God so loved the world, that he gave his *only-begotten Son*," for this purpose. When obstacles stood in the way, when sin needed to be atoned for, that it might be pardoned, "God spared not his only Son, but delivered him up for us all."

Hence, in the verses preceding what I have before quoted, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness" for the relief of the dying Israelites, "even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." Yes, he made his only-begotten Son the sacrifice for our sins, that we should "not perish, but have eternal life."

And mark, finally, on whom these blessings are conferred, and *the medium* through which alone they are received—which is simply your *faith*. "That *whosoever believeth* on him should not perish, but have eternal life." And therefore the passage on which I have dwelt concludes: "He that *believeth* is not condemned, but he that *believeth not* is condemned already, because he hath *not believed* in the name of the only-begotten Son of God."

There remains, therefore no condemnation, but to him that believeth not—to him that rejects, or disregards, or receives not, and applies not God's remedy—the Saviour. As St. Paul testifies:

"There is therefore, now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

And this faith consists in simply receiving Christ for all the purposes for which he is given unto us. "To as many as *received* him, to them gave he power to become the Sons of God." It *comes* to him—it *relies* on him—it thankfully *accepts* his salvation.

And then as to its effects, and as to newness and holiness of heart and life—which is an essential part of salvation—a true faith in Christ will "work by love," constraining the believer to live "to him who died for him and rose again."

How can it be otherwise? Who can receive such an inestimable gift of God as eternal life—conveyed to rebels and enemies through the sacrifice of the only begotten Son of God,—without being filled with gratitude, wonder, love, and praise, and being ready to ask, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?"—and equally ready to reply, "I will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord: I will pay my vows unto the Lord, now in the presence of all his people."

Thou guilty sinner, then, seek no sacrifice besides: no other way of salvation. There *is* no other: thou needest none other. This is open to

thee,—to all. Come to Christ even as thou art, that he may set thee free, and make thee good, and save thee freely. Goodness, and holiness, and newness of life, are indeed to follow, but they *follow* as the *consequence* of the grace of Christ and his goodness to thee;—they do not *go before* as the *condition* of thy obtaining those benefits. No: come unto him without delay. He has said, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out."

This, brethren, is "the gospel." "Unto you is the word of this salvation again sent." Put it not away from you: neglect it not: "it is not a vain thing"—for "it is your life," and in it your eternal life is "bound up." "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

II. Proceed we to speak more distinctly of THE BLESSING of the gospel of Christ. I say more distinctly; for it is impossible to have spoken of the gospel itself, without having noticed in some degree the blessing which it brings with it.

I need not remind you, that the word of God every where speaks of the gospel as the great blessing which God hath vouchsafed to fallen man; so that all ought to be ready to welcome those who announce it, saying, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that

bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace: that bringeth good tidings of good; that publisheth salvation." And accordingly the holy Apostles, in their epistles break forth in thanksgivings to God, and congratulations to the persons concerned, when they hear of any having embraced the gospel.

Alas! for the different feelings which even professed Christians in general have about the gospel. Alas! for the indifference they manifest towards it. It must be adorned and set off with the graces of eloquence, or it cannot draw their attention! Be alarmed, brethren, while you find that you are thus cold and indifferent to the gospel of your salvation. It shows a sick and deathly state of the soul.

But blessed be God, there are those among us—I trust not a small number—who know that the gospel brings an unspeakable blessing along with it. It hath enlightened them who were in darkness; it hath "quickened them who were dead in trespasses and sins;" it hath inspired them with "a hope full of immortality." But we will mention some particulars.

Where the gospel hath been truly received, there is *repentance* of sin. And do I mention this as a blessing? Is not repentance, though it may be a grace of the Spirit, a sad and gloomy grace? Oh! all ye who have known what it was to mourn

for sin with godly sorrow, say is it not a thousand times better and happier than hardness of heart? The one leads to salvation: the other is spiritual death, and the foreboding of eternal death. Oh! how much better to say, "I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord," than to keep a sullen and guilty "silence," while our heart within condemns us. And then when the sense, or even the cheering hope of pardon accompanies our mourning over sin, how does it even convert the drops of grief to joy.

All this has taken place where the gospel is truly received. Repentance does not remain as a future, a doubtful, a gloomy work, which must be done, or we must perish: it *has* taken place, it *does* take place from day to day; and gives evidence that they who thus "sow in tears shall reap in joy." Where the gospel is received, there is *repentance of sin.*

There is also restored *confidence in God.* This is in a measure implied in that very faith which receives the gospel and the Saviour. *That* faith is an 'affiance in the Mediator,' and in the divine mercy through him. And how happy and blessed a state is this!—to look up to God with humble hope and confidence, instead of trembling at the wrath to come!—to view him as reconciled to us, "pacified for all that we have done!" It implies

a totally altered state of mind with respect to Almighty God—altered views of him altogether. We no longer regard him as a hard master, but as a gracious Father: no longer as a severe Judge, but as a merciful Saviour: our rest, our refuge, our portion for ever. O Christian believer, how art thou to be congratulated, who canst thus lift up thy face unto God—confiding not in thine own merits—but in his fatherly love, and in the infinite merits of the Saviour, in whom thou art accepted.

Consequently, yet further, where the gospel is received, there is *the love of God*; and that is the temper and the foretaste of heaven. "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given to us." The glories of the Divine character, especially as seen "in the face of Jesus Christ"—in his person, and redemption, and doctrine,—together with all God's goodness to us, beam before the eyes, and captivate and fill the mind with love and gratitude towards God. And, oh! how different is this, from being "alienated and enemies in our mind"—"enemies to God by wicked works,"—estranged from the thoughts of God, and the service of God, and having his wrath abiding on us! Oh, "we beseech you, be ye reconciled unto God!"

Hence again, where the gospel is received, *the Holy Spirit dwells* in our hearts, and puts forth

there his sanctifying and comforting influences. "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ." "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." "As it is written, I will dwell in them, and walk in them." In the Christian, therefore, the Holy Spirit continually puts forth his divine energy, enabling him to break the chain of his sins in which he was tied and bound, to forsake his former evil practices, to subdue his evil passions, to put off the old man with his affections and lusts, and to put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." "The works of the flesh," therefore, are laid aside, and the "fruits of the Spirit" are produced, "which are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." "The sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience" always accompanies "justification by the blood of Christ," and constitutes a distinct, though inseparable part of "the blessing of the gospel of Christ."

Finally, where the gospel is truly and cordially received, there in proportion the soul is enabled to look forward and "*rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*" Oh, it is a sufficient consolation under all the changing, trying scenes of life and death! Oh, how different from not daring to think of

death and eternity: from being forced to turn away our minds from judgment to come!

How great is the difference between the state of the man who has received the gospel "with faith and love," and the man who has not done so. The one has applied God's remedy for all his sins and miseries, and therefore he is saved; the other has not done so, and therefore he is perishing. The state of the one is life, and liberty, and peace, and hope: that of the other is death, and bondage, and guilt, and fear. "To be carnally minded is death: but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."

This, brethren, is "the blessing of the gospel of Christ." May you know and enjoy it. But, oh! inquire if you have found any such blessing from the gospel; and if you have not, be assured you have not yet rightly received the gospel; and resolve, that by God's grace, sought in humble earnest prayer, you will not rest till you find it.

III. But the Apostle's expression is yet stronger, and conveys a further conception of what the gospel is to do for us. He speaks of the "FULNESS of the blessing of the gospel of Christ." "I am sure, that when I come unto you, I shall come in the FULNESS of the blessing of the gospel of Christ." The persons to whom he wrote had received, and were enjoying "the blessing of the

gospel of Christ." At the fourteenth verse he says to them, "I am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another." Yet he knew that there was still greater blessedness to be found in the gospel than either he or they had yet enjoyed: and therefore he tells them, "I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; that is, that I may be comforted together with you, by the mutual faith both of you and me." And so he would have the Corinthians to receive a second benefit—"an advantage upon that which they had already received from the gospel." And all Scripture urges Christians, "forgetting those things which are behind, to reach forth to those which are before, and to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." On this subject of "the fulness of blessing" we must not enlarge, nor is it necessary. It consists in a fuller and richer measure of those same blessings of which we have spoken—*deeper* repentance—*more lively* faith—*more stable* peace—*more fervent* love—*more lively* hope, and *greater faithfulness* in all good works.

We may notice it first, with regard to *extent;* and secondly, with regard to *degree.*

1. A minister comes among a people "in the

fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ;" when "the word of the Lord," from his mouth, "runs and is glorified;" when great numbers feel its power, and become obedient to the faith; when careless sinners on every side are awakened, and made to feel the vanity and sinfulness of their former pursuits, and to inquire, "What must I do to be saved?" when the ungodly are converted "from the error of their ways," and "the disobedient turned to the wisdom of the just;" when Christ becomes precious to great numbers who had before seen in him "no form nor comeliness that they should desire him;" and when "the love of Christ constrains them, that they should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto him who died for them, and rose again."

2. Then again with regard to the *degree* of blessing on believers. "The fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ" is found, when inquirers do not rest in mere inquiry, but find what they seek after: when their doubts are resolved, and their knowledge cleared up: when their faith is strengthened and leads them "to rejoice in Christ Jesus," while they renounce all "confidence in the flesh:" when "the joy of the Lord is their strength," and they press forward to increasing degrees of holiness: when they are not lukewarm and negligent, but "fervent in

spirit," in "the service of their Lord:" when their "love abounds more and more in knowledge and in all judgment:" when "they approve things that are excellent:" when they "are sincere and without offence:" when they "are filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God:" when they are of "one heart and one soul, striving together for the hope of the gospel;" "and being perfectly joined together, they can with one mind and one mouth, glorify God, even the Father." "Then great grace is upon them all;" and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost they are edified, and their numbers will assuredly be multiplied. Here is "the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ."

This state of things,—both as to the *extent* in point of numbers, and the *degree* of the blessing—received its best and most blessed illustration at and after the day of Pentecost. How did the Lord then "add to the church daily such as should be saved;" and how were "the whole multitude of them that believed of one heart," and how did they all abound in the fruits of the Spirit. May the Lord restore like times unto his people! Oh that we may witness such a state of things in all our churches and congregations! Pour down, O Lord, Thy Spirit from on high upon us! 'Raise up Thy

power and come among us, and with great might succour us!'

And now, brethren, I would only further press this upon you as the object of your prayers for yourselves, and for your ministers, and for your fellow-worshippers—that "the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ" may be known and enjoyed among us all. It is the greatest good that we can know on earth, and it will prepare us for the highest happiness in heaven. Brethren, consider this as the prayer appropriate to the present time, and our present circumstances. I have reason to believe that great numbers of you welcome me very cordially and kindly back to my church and my pulpit. I have no reason to think otherwise than that you *all* so welcome me; and I meet this kindly feeling of yours with a return of grateful and affectionate feeling towards you, and the most earnest desire to be more useful to you than I have ever yet been. But I am ready to say, it will be little worth while for me to have returned unto you from the gates of the grave, unless I may be made the instrument of spiritual benefit to you, and of promoting your salvation; that so we may at length rejoice together with eternal joy. But if I may now "come among you in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of

Christ: " if I may enjoy that blessing richly myself, and prove the means of imparting it to you: if this may be the effect of my illness, and my recovery, and my future labours, (if God shall strengthen me for future labours,) this will indeed be well worth all, and more than all.

Oh! brethren, hope for this, expect it, plead with God in prayer for it. Seek a more abundant measure of his blessing—the pouring out of his Spirit upon us. This is what is wanting. Good, we trust, spiritual good is done—and has been done, —but not in large measure. Let us now seek a richer measure of these blessings—that they " who have believed through grace," may abound in joy, and in all the holy fruits of the Spirit; and that numbers who have been hitherto dead in trespasses and sins, may be made alive to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Oh, if what any of us have passed through may conduce to such a result, or better qualify us for promoting it, we may well say, happy affliction, happy pain, happy suffering—as well as blessed consolation which counterbalanceth it. Thus, brethren, may it be for your benefit whether we are afflicted or whether we are comforted.

THE END.